MARCH 1998
$3.00/£2.00

MONTHLY REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

SOURCES AND RESOURCES OF ZAPATISM

MICHAEL LÖWY

VOL. 49

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPERIALISM

UWE-JENS HEUER and GREGOR SCHIRMER

10

THE NEW THEOLOGY OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

ROBERT W. McCHESNEY

03>

ALSO INSIDE:

Doug Dowd reviews Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney; and David Bellin and Jeremy Raw respond to Andy Pollack.

7 42055 79772 5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MONTHLY REVIEW VOLUME 49 NUMBER 10 MARCH 1998

REVIEW OF THE MONTH:
SOURCES AND RESOURCES OF ZAPATISM
by Michael Löwy 1

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPERIALISM
by Uwe-Jens Heuer and Gregor Schirmer 5

THE NEW THEOLOGY OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT:
CLASS PRIVILEGE OVER DEMOCRACY by Robert W. McChesney 17

BEING WHITE IN BLACK/WHITE RELATIONS:
A PROFESSOR'S SINGULAR LIFE JOURNEY by Edwin D. Hoffman 35

BOOKS
Horror Show, Inc. by Doug Dowd 50

CORRESPONDENCE
A Response to Andy Pollack's 'Information Technology and Socialist Self Management'
by David Bellin and Jeremy Raw 56

MONTHLY REVIEW:
(ISSN 0027 0520) is a publication of Monthly Review Foundation, a non-profit institution. It is published monthly except July and August, when bimonthly, and copyright © 1997, by Monthly Review. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes (Form 3579) to Monthly Review Foundation, 122 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001. EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS: 122 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001. Telephone: (212) 691-2555. Fax: (212) 727-3676 Email: mreview@igc.apc.org. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. MR is indexed in the PAIS Bulletin, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, Political Science Abstracts, and the Alternative Press Index. P.O. Box 33109, Baltimore, MD 21218, tel.: (410) 243-2470. NEWSSTAND DISTRIBUTION: B.De Boer, Inc., 113 E. Centre Street, Nutley, NJ 07110; Armadillo & Co., 5795 W. Washington Boulevard, Culver City, CA 90232; Small Changes, 3443 Twelfth Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119; Central Books, 99 Wallis Road. London, E9 5LN, England. SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: U.S.: One year $28, students and senior citizens $23; Foreign $36; students and senior citizens $32. Libraries and Institutions: U.S. $48; Foreign $55. Additional Postage: First Class (U.S. and Canada $15); Airmail: Foreign $20.

EDITORS:
Paul M. Sweezy Harry Magdoff Ellen Meiksins Wood Leo Huberman (1903-1968)
Associate Editor: W.H. Locke Anderson Assistant Editor: Kira Brunner Circulation Manager: Martin Paddio

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

A striking feature of the mountain of talk about the Asian crisis is that its root cause is all too often ignored The focus of the media and the pundits is on weak banks, bad management, corrupt officials, heavy indebtedness, excess speculation, and the fragility of the financial markets. Typically, the disaster is viewed as a regional affair. A rare exception is the statement of Eisuke Sakakibara, Japan's vice-minister for international finance: "This isn't an Asian crisis. It is a crisis of global

(Continued on inside back cover)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CURRENT PERIODICALS
MAR 2 9 1999
BROOKLYN COLLEGE
LIBRARY

SOURCES AND RESOURCES OF ZAPATISM

by MICHAEL LÖWY

translated from the French by JOAN PINKHAM

We are living in a time when the world is dis-enchanted. Now more than ever before, capitalism, in its neoliberal form, has reduced all social relations, all values, all qualities to the status of commodities. This is a realm of universal quantification, commercialization, monetarization. This is an age when all human feelings are drowned in what Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto*, called "the icy water of egotistical calculation."

Zapatism, a movement opposed to neoliberalism, seeks, on a modest scale, to re-enchant the world. (I am borrowing this idea from Yvon Le Bot's 1997 book *Le Rêve zapatiste* [The Zapatista Dream], but giving it a slightly different interpretation.) It is a movement freighted with magic, with myths, utopias, poetry, romanticism, enthusiasms, and wild hopes, with "mysticism" (in the sense that Charles Péguy used the word, in opposition to "politics"),[1] and with faith. It is also full of insolence, humor, irony, and self-irony. There is no contradiction in that: as Lukács wrote in *The Theory of the Novel*, irony is the mysticism of times without a god....[2]

Michael Löwy, is the research director in sociology at the National Center of Scientific Research, Paris. He is author of *The Marxism of Che Guevara* (Monthly Review, 1972), and *On Changing the World* (Humanities Press, 1992).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This ability to reinvent the re-enchantment of the world is no doubt one of the reasons why Zapatism is so fascinating to people far beyond the mountains of Chiapas.

What is Zapatism composed of? It is a subtle mixture, an alchemistic fusion, an explosive cocktail made up of several ingredients, several traditions, each of them indispensable, each of them present in the final product. Or rather, it is a carpet made of threads of different colors, old and new, interwoven in a wonderful design whose secret is known only to the Mayan Indians.

The first thread, the first tradition is *Guevarism*—Marxism in its Latin American revolutionary from. The original core of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) was Guevarist. Of course, the evolution of the movement has taken it far from its beginnings, but the uprising of January 1994 and the very spirit of the EZLN retain elements of this heritage: the importance of armed struggle, the organic link between the armed forces and the peasantry, the rifle as a material expression of an exploited people's distrust of their oppressors, the readiness to risk one's life for the emancipation of one's brothers. We are a long way from the Bolivian adventure of 1967 but close to the revolutionary ethic of which Che was the incarnation.

The second thread, and doubtless the most direct, is of course *the legacy of Emiliano Zapata.* It is the uprising of the peasants and indigenous people, the *Ejercito del Sur* as an army of the masses, the uncompromising struggle against the powerful that does not seek to seize power, the agrarian program for the redistribution of land, and the community organization of peasant life (what Adolfo Gilly called the "commune of Morelos"). But at the same time, it is Zapata the internationalist, who, in a famous letter of February 1918, hailed the Russian Revolution, emphasizing "the visible analogy, the obvious parallelism, the absolute parity" between it and the agrarian revolution in Mexico. "Both of them," he wrote, "are directed against what Tolstoy called 'the great crime,' against the infamous usurpation of the earth, which, belonging to all, like the water

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the air, has been monopolized by a few powerful men, supported by the strength of armies and the iniquity of laws."

"Land and Liberty" remains the central slogan of the new Zapatistas, who are continuing a revolution "interrupted" (as Gilly put it in the title of his beautiful book)[3] in 1919, by the assassination of Zapata in Chinameca.

A thread that the Zapatistas don't talk much about is *liberation theology*. Yet it is hard to imagine that their movement could have had such an impact in Chiapas had it not been for the work accomplished by Msgr. Samuel Ruiz and his thousands of catechists ever since the 1970s—the work of raising consciousness in the indigenous communities and of encouraging them to organize to struggle for their rights. Of course, that work had no revolutionary tendency and rejected all violence, whereas the dynamics of the EZLN were to be entirely different. It is nonetheless true that in the indigenous communities the thinking of many Zapatistas—including some of the most prominent—was basically molded by liberation theology, by a religious faith that chose a commitment to the self-emancipation of the poor.

Perhaps the most important thread is *the Mayan culture* of the native people of Chiapas, with its magical relation to nature, its community solidarity, its resistance to neoliberal modernization. Zapatism harks back to a community tradition of the past, a pre-capitalist, pre-modern, pre-Columbian tradition. The Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui spoke, not without some exaggeration, of the "communism of the Incas." In the same spirit, one can speak of the "communism of the Mayas." Is that romanticism? Perhaps. But without the magic hammer of revolutionary romanticism, how are we to break the bars of what Max Weber called the steel cage in which capitalist modernity has confined us?

The EZLN is heir to five centuries of native resistance to the Conquest, to "civilization" and "modernity." It is no coincidence that the Zapatista uprising was originally planned for 1992, the fifth centenary of the Conquest, and that at that time crowds of indigenous people occupied San Cristóbal de las Casas and tore down the statue of the Conquistador Diego

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

de Mazariegos, the hated symbol of their despoliation and enslavement.

The last, most recent thread, added to the others after January 1994, consists of *the democratic demands made by Mexican civil society*, by that vast network of unions, neighborhood associations, women's, students', and ecologists' associations, of Leftist parties—Cárdenists, Trotskyists, anarchists, and many other -ists—of associations of debtors, peasants, and indigenous communities that have risen up throughout Mexico to support the demands of the Zapatistas: democracy, dignity, justice.

There are many things one can criticize about the Zapatistas—for example, I don't understand why they did not issue a call to vote for Cárdenas in the last elections. But we must grant them one tremendous virtue: in these gloomy closing years of the century, in this time of triumphant neoliberalism, of rampant commercialism, of galloping cynicism, of a politics of politicians, they have succeeded in making people dream—in Chiapas, in Mexico, and in places all over the planet. They are re-enchanters of the world.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

1. That sense is perhaps best summed up in Péguy's own definition of the two terms: "*[L]a mystique républicaine, c'était quand on mourait pour la République, la politique républicaine, c'est à présent qu'on en vit.*" (Republican mysticism meant dying for the Republic; republican politics at present means living off it. —JP) From the pamphlet *Notre Jeunesse* (1910) in Charles Péguy, *Oeuvres en prose complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), Vol. III, p. 156.
2. "The writer's irony is a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god." From Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (1920), translated from the German by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971), p. 90.
3. An expanded version of Adolfo Gilly's *La Revolución interrumpida* (1971) has been translated from the Spanish by Patrick Camiller under the title *The Mexican Revolution* (London: N.L.B., 1983).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPERIALISM

by UWE-JENS HEUER and GREGOR SCHIRMER

translated from the German by ANITA MAGE

"Human Rights" has been for a generation the chosen battlefield of U.S. worldwide propaganda. The United States, which imprisons a much larger percentage of its population than any other country, routinely sets itself up as the universal arbiter of human rights. Its propagandists argue that the sole alternative to the "universality" of human rights as set out by Jesse Helms, Madeleine Albright and George Soros is a relativism that would give a different meaning to human rights depending on whether the humans involved are Western or Chinese, Judeo-Christian or Muslim, and so on. But this is a false dilemma. Despite its pretensions, U.S. interests are not universal interests; its courts are not World Courts; its law is not international law. But there are indeed universal human rights that have emerged in the global struggle to acknowledge our common humanity. As Uwe-Jens Heuer and Gregor Schirmer argue, they are those rights set out in international law by the treaties and declarations that have obtained the concurrence of the states of the world. We must fight for the recognition in practice of these human rights worldwide. And perhaps their greatest enemy is none other than that very "Human Rights" that is no more than a tool of U.S. policy, and is proclaimed to the world ad nauseum by its media, its NGOs, and its diplomats.

—The Editors

Prof. Dr. Uwe-Jens Heuer is a member of the German Bundestag and spokesman for the Party of Democratic Socialism Bundestag group on questions of law and justice. Prof. Dr. Gregor Schirmer is his staff assistant and colleague.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I

Human rights were embodied in international law for the first time half a century ago. According to the United Nations Charter, one of the goals of the organization is international cooperation "to advance and strengthen the respect of human rights and basic freedoms for all people, regardless of race, sex, language and religion." The thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 set out in detail the UN Charter's goal of international cooperation for the advancement of human rights and basic freedoms. The Convention on Prevention and Prosecution of Genocide of the same year is a great advance and landmark in the body of international law, binding on the states that have ratified it. These two achievements, which came at the very moment of the inception of the cold war, were due to the continuing democratic-antifascist impetus of the struggle and victory of the Anti-Hitler coalition in the Second World War. In the verdicts at Nuremberg the Nazi leaders were not only convicted of war crimes but also of crimes against humankind. The recognition of human rights in international law is thus a lasting triumph of the great antifascist coalition that split apart with the start of the cold war. But in its aspect as ideology (as opposed to its aspect as an element of international law), "human rights" became an effective weapon of the cold war and remains a heavily used propaganda tool of the new neoliberal global regime. It is on this distinction between human rights in international law and in (neo-imperial) ideology that we focus here.

The next great advance after 1948 came with the adoption of the two International Covenants, on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in 1966. These treaties are legally binding, but there is only an extremely weak mechanism for their implementation. The explicit inclusion of economic, social, and cultural rights as human rights within the scope of international law was a major accomplishment. It stands today as a reproach to orthodox neoliberal ideology, although it is characteristic that social

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rights are formulated as general goals to be gradually reached. These treaties were made in the context of that advance in human freedoms marked by the breakdown of the colonial system and the growth of the liberation movements. The primary international political actors have not been quick to ratify these treaties, which first took effect in 1976. The United States first joined the treaty on political rights in 1992, and still does not adhere to the treaty on social rights.

The human rights established in these and other universal and regional agreements are certainly not the *ne plus ultra* of the legal regulation of the development of human emancipation. But the world would certainly look completely different and much more just, were human rights to be realized like those recognized in Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (including the rights to food, clothing, shelter, and improvement of the conditions of life).

II

But the reality is different. In all parts of the world human rights were and are negated and trampled upon daily. One cause of the failure of the socialist states in Europe was the disregard of, and injury to, human rights. Today the countries which purport to be defenders of human rights, including Germany and the United States, disregard human rights in their own territories. In Germany there are continuous multiple violations of the human rights of non-EU foreign residents and of citizens of the former GDR. Hunger and poverty in the third world are denials of elementary human rights. In Rwanda, inhumane conditions degenerated into genocide.

In the case of grave injury to human rights, it seems clear that states should not remain passive in the name of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of another country. But this is just one side of the story. The other side is that the question of human rights was abused by the United States and NATO as a tool aimed at the destruction of what *had* been achieved in the socialist countries, is still abused as a vehicle for the assertion of hegemonic interests against the independence of states of the third world, and is ever more frequently accompanied by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

use of military power. This is a dangerous development which can properly be designated human rights imperialism.

Henry Kissinger argued in his book, *The Reason of Nations*, that where Nixon, Ford, and Carter had found "human rights" to be useful in their political language, Reagan and his advisors went further and put "human rights" into the toolbox to be actively used in the destruction of "communism" and the "democratization" of the Soviet Union. How the ideology of "human rights" was used to deprive hundreds of millions of people of their *social and economic* rights requires more attention than it has so far received.

III

The following ideological pattern lies behind the instrumentalization of human rights:

First, the sphere of law ("Right") and human rights are (conceptually) separated from the state and from politics. But Right, and with it, international law, is a social product, the result of social struggles, and only comes to be when it is set out as law and sanctioned by the state. Once thus set out, law does take on a certain degree of autonomy and in turn affects the society and politics from which it arises.

But the separation of Right from the state and politics leads to its mythification. It now seems to come from the heavens above. The question of democratic legitimation of Right (through historical social struggles) disappears, as if the decisions of courts could somehow legitimate themselves. In Anglo-American legal thinking, these notions have played an important role for a long time. In international law the separation of Right from states and politics similarly disguises how crisis-reaction military intervention and *ad hoc* adjudication, as is being tried presently in Bosnia, occur by means of the exclusion of the international community of states.

Second, human rights are separated from the governing principles of international law. Instead, human rights are presented as a species of natural law self-evident to the elect. The controlling principles of the UN Charter, of sovereign equality, non-intervention, international cooperation, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prohibition of violence, are no longer of interest. But human rights can only be realized through the respect of these principles. The UN Charter puts human rights in the context of cooperation of the member states, not in confrontation. The Declaration on the Principles of International Law, approved by the General Assembly in 1970 by consensus, sets out that universal protection and respect for human rights and basic freedoms for all (as well as the abolition of all forms of racial discrimination and religious intolerance) are to be secured through international cooperation.

Since the demolition of the USSR and the end of the cold war, there have been a number of cases where the United States and NATO have reacted militarily to the injury of human rights in other countries ("humane intervention"), justified as supposedly the only remaining way to preserve the peace and to save human life. But such military violence is a totally inappropriate means for human rights enforcement. The threat and use of violence in international relations is forbidden (Article 2 no. 4). Lacking compliance with the provisions of the UN Charter, "humane intervention" is in violation of international law.

Third, the unity of all human rights is then dissolved. Human rights get divided into two categories (political/civil and economic/social). The purported defenders of human rights are only interested in political/civil rights; economic/social rights are of no interest to them. Indeed, they deny their existence as rights. But unemployment, for example, is not just a temporary state of affairs but of the very nature of capitalism, and a permanent and grave injury to human rights. The untimely death of millions (without peacetime parallel in our times) in Yeltsin's capitalist restoration in Russia due to hunger, disease, and despair (in the forms of narcotics and alcohol abuse) are not considered human rights crimes although brought about with callous brutality.

Each human right stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence with each other, and thus forms a unity which cannot be destroyed. Political and civil rights are unconditionally necessary and can not be compensated through economic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and social rights. This we had to learn painfully in our country, the GDR. But now we are having the no less painful experience that these (political and civil) rights exist primarily in the space of pious imagination, and are experienced by the former citizens of the GDR as a welcome but very limited increase in freedom, because these political rights are not sufficiently supported by the realization of social rights. The wretched of today's world—the poor, the starving, the homeless, the children condemned to starvation and disease, the women without rights, the old people left to live out their lives in want, even when in full possession of civil and political rights are not free. Nor are people really free when they are socially secure but politically disempowered.

Fourth, these reduced human rights become the ground for the generalization of "human rights injuries," with no specific reference to international norms. With no anchor in international law, human rights end up in the juridically dubious sphere of natural law. No explicit definition of human rights injury remains. One refers to the "idea" of human rights. This makes it easy to impose onto the current target of "structural adjustment" whatever notions of human rights are formulated by the lickspittles of such as Rupert Murdoch or the currency speculator George Soros. The development of human rights in the European Enlightenment, the independence struggles of the western hemisphere, and the bourgeois revolutions in Europe is a great historical accomplishment. It negates these human rights to make them into tools of neoliberal immiseration or to extend them through pressure and violence.

The universality of human rights must be understood as a process of peaceful cooperation, as an effort to have the participation of as many states as possible in the ratification of the already existing treaties, the drafting of new treaties, and the fulfillment of responsibilities. The universality of human rights is not an abstract principle but rather the binding character of the concrete norms of the UN Charter (and other agreements) for those states party to them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IV

Now, as before, the realization of human rights is—granted, not exclusively, but for the most part—the responsibility of the state concerned. But no state can appeal to its sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in order to withdraw itself from its international human rights obligations. The other states, insofar as they have also taken on such obligations—and the UN within the bounds of its jurisdiction and powers—can demand of another state that it meet its obligations. They can use to this end the agreed-on procedures permitted by international law, but military force does not belong among the permitted steps. The UN is not a suprastate with police and judicial functions which can arbitrarily govern the individual states. And these functions are certainly not in the jurisdiction of the United States and NATO.

But how should a state act, if civil unrest in another state puts its nationals there in danger? Does the state have the right, or perhaps even the obligation, to rescue its citizens from such dangers, even with military power?

We would like to report for the English language reader an event which found little echo in the media, but is illustrative of the above problem. At the time of civil-war like conditions in Albania (in March 1997), German soldiers entered Albanian territory by helicopter in order to remove German and other foreign citizens. Shots were fired. That there were no dead or injured was pure chance. Consent of the Albanian government was not given. Germany acted alone. Neither the UN nor NATO was consulted beforehand. The explanation given was that this should become the usual way of dealing with complicated situations. The German army (*Bundeswehr*) is being trained for such situations. But are such actions legally, morally, or politically justifiable? We think not.

Such actions are in violation of international law. There are only two exceptions to the UN Charter's strict prohibition of force: the right of self defense against armed aggression; and coercive measures of the UN Security Council, when the Security Council has established that a threat to peace or an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

act of aggression has occurred. These exceptions did not apply to the case of the German action in Albania. It is unconscionable that a state would act above the law and with armed force to enter another state to rescue its really (or purportedly) endangered citizens. Who decides whether such a threat really exists, or whether no other option but military force remains? Who can exclude the possibility that such actions could develop into wars?

V

But what should happen when, within a sovereign state, human rights are systematically and gravely injured to the point of genocide? Regrettably the 1948 Genocide Convention gives no guidance on how it is to be enforced. Such cases are no internal affair of the state concerned. Should not the international community intervene as quickly and effectively as possible—that is, with all, even military, means? In answering this difficult question we think the following points must be considered:

First, who actually intervenes , and where? As a rule it is the powerful of this world, not the weak. The intervening powers are the United States, NATO, other Western states. Only they are in the military, economic, or financial position to carry out actions like those in the Persian Gulf or Somalia. In the case of Security Council resolutions, it is certain among the veto-powers (the United States, England, France) who are the key interveners. The "New World Order" in fact consists of a small group of powerful states playing world policeman.

Second, against whom is such intervention taken? Naturally never the capitalist great powers, NATO or European Union members. Certainly not against Great Britain in Northern Ireland, nor in Chechenia against the weakened but still nuclear Russia, nor against China in Tibet, nor against the United States in South Central Los Angeles. What remain as possible objects of intervention are a small number of weak states forsaken both by God and their allies. And even among these states a selection of the weakest is made. Political oppor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tunism, not the gravity of the human rights injury, determines when and where the big guns are brought out.

Third, which grounds justify military intervention, and who decides in each case if such grounds obtain? No norms of international law define such grounds. The Security Council can resolve to take military measures when a threat to, or breach of, peace occurs (Article 39 of the UN Charter). But under which circumstances are human rights injuries at the same time breaches of peace or a threat to peace? That is a purely political decision by the Security Council, that is, by the five holders of veto-power. There are no certain criteria. The grounds for military intervention are defined by those who intervene. The absence of criteria regrettably opens the way to arbitrary action in the name of human rights, and often to imperialist action in this disguise.

Fourth, for whose benefit, and in whose interest, does the military intervention take place? We do not want to deny that military interventions like those of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, of Vietnam in Pol Pot's Cambodia, or of the United States in Somalia may well have saved human lives, and may well have worked to the benefit of those threatened by hunger and terror. But in all these cases, and in others as well, the altruism of the intervening parties was a mere secondary phenomenon to crude self-interested efforts toward the expansion of political and military power, spheres of economic influence, and the like.

VI

Rejection of military force as the means of enforcing human rights does not imply exclusion of all means. There are provisions for "civil" means in international law (diplomatic steps, economic sanctions, political isolation in international organizations). An example of a qualified success, partially achieved by these means, is the international campaign against the apartheid regime in South Africa that commenced in the 1960s and 1970s. These peaceful means were never, in any of the more recent cases of military "humane intervention," fully exhausted before the resort to arms. We are conscious of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ambivalence in such "civil" reactions. They are not to be approved casually merely because they are "civil." They are also subject to power politics. They are often directed against the people whose rights ought to be protected, instead of against the holders of power who disrespect these rights, and are often used arbitrarily and selectively. But non-military means are much more humane than wars waged in the name of human rights.

At times hopes are placed in an international criminal jurisdiction, the organ of which would be an international criminal court. This court would judge cases of grave human rights injuries according to agreed-upon norms of international law, and impose sentences on the offenders. We ought not to reject efforts in this direction *a priori*, but a severe skepticism is necessary. Perhaps a definition of human rights crimes (and corresponding norms which define liability to criminal prosecution) could be agreed upon. But it is totally improbable that the states of the world in which we now live would ever consent to enforcement of international arrest warrants against their own officials within their own territory, or to the extradition of their own officials to an international authority for prosecution and punishment.

The Rwanda and Yugoslavia tribunals are not hopeful steps toward international criminal law—they are *ad hoc* courts established to judge weak states, in violation of the principle of the equality of states. To try the responsible U.S. officials in a Vietnam tribunal or Yeltsin and his crew in a Chechenia tribunal is in practice impossible. The violent manner in which NATO soldiers carried out warrants against two Bosnian Serbs in their own country (in which one Serbian was killed) without the permission of the state authorities must not be allowed to become a common and tolerated practice.

Experience has shown that as things stand today, international criminal law is either impossible or degenerates into an instrument of imperialist politics. Under current conditions, with the United States the sole global superpower and with neoliberal (and U.S.) hegemony both asserted and contested

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on every continent, there simply cannot be a Nuremberg tribunal with universal authority valid for all countries and people.

VII

The question remains whether and how, in light of this critical and pessimistic picture, conditions in conformity with human rights can ever be realized in this world. If one recognizes that the causes of human rights injuries lie in a specific set of social relations, in which the highest goals are the extraction of profit from commodified human labor and the accumulation of capital in the centers of imperial power, then the solution lies in the struggle against these relations.

At the international level this is a struggle for peaceful and equal relations between all states and peoples, large and small, strong and weak. This path is one of peace and disarmament, of securing autonomous economic development and humane conditions of life in the third world, and conserving of the natural environment.

A new generation of human rights—of an individual and a collective nature—are being voiced: the rights to peace, development, and an intact environment. The question of human rights thus recovers the dimension eliminated in the process of its instrumentalization in U.S. policy. But to realize these rights the following are necessary: a rigorous democratization of international relations; a reduction of the power of multinational corporations and finance capital; and the increased importance of a democratically reformed UN as a center of cooperation for problem solving, with human rights in a most prominent place. This *really* new world order would have to uphold the rule of law instead of "might makes right." And international law, and therefore human rights, must cease to be a cynical instrument in the policy of great powers, but become the measure and limit of state power.

A utopian view of international law? The attempt must be made to change the world, even if it is not clear whether it will succeed. The alternatives are barbarism or (a stage on the same road) the global dictatorship of the United States and its accomplices. In this dictatorship the decision to enforce

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

human rights or to tolerate (or even approve and carry out) human rights injuries would be made, as it is today in Washington, as is convenient for the reproduction of the current polarized "world order." This would be the final perversion of the idea of human rights into human rights imperialism. Although under present conditions it may seem a daunting task, the attempt must nevertheless be made "to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the paramount rules of the intercourse of nations" (Karl Marx, Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association, October 1864).

Announcing:

Spectres of Capitalism

A Critique of Current Intellectual Fashions

by Samir Amin

Monthly Review Press

1998

The author will read and discuss his work

Thursday March 19 at Labyrinth Books

536 W. 112th Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam, NYC

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE NEW THEOLOGY OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT: CLASS PRIVILEGE OVER DEMOCRACY

by ROBERT W. McCHESNEY

The First Amendment stands as the crown jewel of the U.S. Constitution. Although it often has been ignored and violated throughout U.S. history, the First Amendment is the republic's shining commitment to individual freedom of expression and to the protection of this institutional requirements for an informed electorate and a participatory democracy. Yet what exactly the First Amendment signifies and does has been the subject of considerable debate over the years. Currently or in the near future, any number of cases are and will be working their way through the court system that would seek to prohibit any government regulation of political campaign spending, broadcasting, and commercial speech (e.g. advertising or food labeling) on the grounds that such regulation would violate citizens' and corporations' First Amendment rights to free speech or free press. Each case raises quite distinct constitutional issues concerning the First Amendment, but they share the common effect of protecting the ability of the wealthy and powerful few to act in their self-interest without fear of public examination, debate and action.

Robert W. McChesney teaches journalism at the University of Wisconsin Madison. He the co-author with Edward S. Herman of *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997).
The author would like to thank Noam Chomsky and Vivek Chibber.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is no surprise that the political right and the business community approve of this extension of First Amendment protection to these activities. To the extent commercial activities are given First Amendment protection, it makes the rule of capital increasingly off-limits to political debate and government regulation. And if political campaign contributions cannot be regulated, it puts the entire political process ever more firmly under the thumbs of the wealthy. What is striking, however, is that the venerable American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has lined up, more often than not, as an advocate of these "extensions" of the First Amendment. Wrapped in the most flowery jargon imaginable, the ACLU promotes the notion that this interpretation of the First Amendment is the truly democratic one.

I argue in this article that the ACLU and progressives who might be persuaded by the ACLU's logic are making a terrible mistake, and one that cannot be justified if one maintains a commitment to political democracy. This error is part and parcel of a broader process whereby the First Amendment has become more a mechanism for protecting class privilege than for protecting and promoting freedom and democracy. In my view, progressives need to stake out a democratic interpretation of the First Amendment and do direct battle with the Orwellian implications of the ACLU's commercialized First Amendment. And, as should be clear, this is far more than an academic battle: the manner in which the First Amendment is interpreted has a direct bearing on our politics, media, and culture. That is why the political right and business community have devoted so much attention to converting it into their own possession.

The Utopian Case for a Commercialized First Amendment

Beginning in the 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court has rendered a number of decisions which have increasingly extended First Amendment protection to corporations and commercial activities. As for political contributions, the Supreme Court first considered whether the government could constitutionally regulate campaign contributions in 1976, in *Buckley v. Valeo.* It upheld that right on balance, but the Court

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also stated that individuals had a First Amendment right to contribute as much of their own money as they wished to their own political campaigns, à la Ross Perot. The ACLU is among those who want not only to maintain this aspect of *Buckley v. Valeo,* but also to grant First Amendment protection to nearly all other forms of campaign contributions. As an ACLU counsel notes, government limitations on campaign spending "would trammel the First Amendment rights of political parties and their supporters."

This claim is made despite the chilling effect that the current cash-driven electoral system has on the nature and caliber of U.S. participatory democracy. The electoral system in the United States is in severe crisis, a crisis typified by low voter turnout, a narrow range of debate where substantive issues are studiously ignored, and a degree of depoliticization that makes perfect sense for such a vapid political culture. The current system elevates people with no credentials, but vast inherited fortunes, to almost automatic political prominence—like Steve Forbes, Michael Huffington and U.S. Senator Herb Kohl to mention just a few—while marginalizing dedicated citizens with lifetimes of public service (but who refuse large contributions on principle) like Ralph Nader. The cash-driven electoral system is not the only factor that explains the decrepit state of U.S. politics, but it is among the prime culprits. And whether or not it is the cause, it is impossible to think of any solution that leads to the revitalization of U.S. electoral politics without significant reform of campaign spending.

The ACLU's argument, in a nutshell, goes something like this: if the First Amendment is applied to any and all forms of speech, then the net result will be a flowering marketplace of ideas. As long as the government is kept away from speech, only good things will happen for democracy. And the ability to spend money on campaigns is an inexorable aspect of speech; if it is regulated then we are on a slippery slope where all other forms of speech may soon be under government regulation and censorship. After all, censorship is contagious. This is basically the same argument used to extend the First Amendment to broadcasting, advertising, and other commercial activities.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At its most eloquent, this liberal argument for extending the First Amendment to political spending and, with qualification, to many commercial activities promises the greatest possible democratic political culture. But we have massive firsthand experience to show how absurd this claim is. In the past thirty years the First Amendment has been extended by the courts to cover vast areas—generally commercial—and our media and electoral systems may be the least regulated in the developed world. By the ACLU laissez-faire formulation this should be the golden age of participatory democracy. But, in fact, this is arguably the low point in U.S. democratic participation. In many respects we now live in a society that is only formally democratic, as the great mass of citizens have minimal say on the great public issues of the day, and such issues are scarcely debated at all in any meaningful sense in the electoral arena. This political marketplace of ideas looks a lot more like a junkyard than a flower bed. To paraphrase a line from a Woody Allen movie, if John Stuart Mill were around today, he would never stop throwing up.

There are two flaws with the ACLU vision. First is the notion that the government is the only anti-democratic force in our society. Government can be and at times is a threat to democracy—and deserves constant vigilance—but this is not a meritocratic society otherwise. Nearly all theories of democracy from Aristotle to Madison to the present have recognized that democracy was fundamentally incompatible with pronounced social inequality. In our society, corporations and the wealthy enjoy a power every bit as immense as that enjoyed by the lords and royalty of feudal times. This class power works through means like campaign spending to assure inequality and limit democracy. Second, markets are not value-free or neutral; they not only tend to work to the advantage of those with the most money, but they also by their very nature emphasize profit over all else. A commercial marketplace of ideas may generate the maximum returns for investors, but that does not mean it will generate the highest caliber of political exchange for citizens. In fact, contemporary evidence shows it to do nothing of the kind.[1]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If income and wealth were relatively equally distributed in the United States, I would be open to an argument that equated political spending with speech.[2] But we do not live in anything remotely close to an egalitarian society. The top one percent of the population owns one-half of the financial wealth, while the bottom 80 percent has around 6 percent. The top one percent of the population receives nearly 20 percent of U.S. income while the bottom 80 percent of the population divvies up around 45 percent of U.S. income. Letting people spend as much money as they want is simply letting people at the top buy their ways out of a genuine democracy with a level playing field. Even leaving aside the hundreds of millions spend by corporate PACs (and why should we?), something along the lines of 90 percent of all individual campaign contributions come from those with annual incomes in excess of $100,000—i.e. from only the very top few percentage points of the U.S. income distribution. Is it any surprise that government policies pushed by both major parties—each dependent upon massive gifts from those with money in order to compete—have increased the polarization of U.S. society over the past twenty years? And is it any surprise that countless Americans—especially from the lower 80 percent—regard U.S. politics as a sick joke? Can anyone possibly think this will change as long as our elections are auctions?

But what about concerns of the slippery slope, that if the government regulates campaign contributions it will open the door to the regulation of the content of books and magazines and the infringement of other freedoms? The slippery slope principle is legitimate but it simply does not apply willy-nilly. There is no evidence that anyone has ever had any trouble distinguishing the regulation of campaign contributions from the censorship of the press or speech. In a related area, for fifty-some years the federal government has been regulating advertising, and to my knowledge it has never led to a single case of some zealous regulator sliding down the slope to begin censoring editorial content surrounding the ads.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Absolutist Defense

At this point ACLU liberals stop defending the extension of the First Amendment to political spending (or commercial speech) from the claim that this is a good or necessary thing for democracy that can be verified empirically, and begin to invoke so-called principle. The argument goes that speech needs no defense to be protected by the First Amendment; it is a civil right with value to the individual that simply cannot be abridged. This is sometimes characterized as the "absolutist" position, and, in the end, this principle provides the strongest case for protecting spending and perhaps even extending the First Amendment to new commercial activities. But it still does not fly, because absolutism is anything but absolute. Modern free speech absolutism and civil libertarian groups like the ACLU were born in the tumultuous first decades of the twentieth century, with strident commitments to the protection of dissident political opinion and labor activism from government harassment. Absolutism was inspired by the promise of democracy, but, after defining what speech was necessary for democracy, it was also absolutist in its rejection of any government regulation, regardless of the justification.

Hence absolutism, and arguably any theory of the First Amendment for that matter, has two components. The theory first determine what constitutes "speech," or, put another way, what speech is protected. Then, once that determination has been made, it is protected absolutely. But even the most strident "absolutist" cannot avoid determining what speech qualifies, or what constitutes speech. Hence today the debate is over whether advertising, or food labeling, or campaign contributions are speech. I have no qualms about extending the First Amendment net to include areas that may not have any clear connection to politics, but I think principle is necessary to guide the debate. And a good start is this: if the rights to be protected by the First Amendment can only be effectively employed by a fraction of the citizenry, and their exercise of these rights gives them undue political power and undermines the ability of the balance of the citizenry to exercise the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same rights and/or other constitutional rights, then it is not necessarily legitimately protected by the First Amendment.

The first great wave of twentieth century absolutists, including people like Alexander Meiklejohn, argued that the First Amendment protected any and all political speech under any and all circumstances. But they also argued that commercial speech (like advertising) was not protected by the First Amendment, but rather by the Fifth Amendment and its "freedom to contract" clause. Indeed, Meiklejohn argued that if commercial speech were given the same weight under the First Amendment as political speech, the First Amendment would lose its integrity and soon become primarily a tool for commercial interests who had no particular interest whatsoever in politics and public life per se.[3] That is exactly what is happening today. Meiklejohnian absolutism, like all other theories of the First Amendment, presents several problems determining what exactly is protected speech, but it has the core strength of keeping its eyes on the prize: democracy.

Since campaign spending was not a particularly pressing issue in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century—due largely to the lack of paid TV political advertising—it does not get discussed much by the first generation of absolutists, people like Meiklejohn, Hugo Black, and, later Thomas Emerson.[4] But there is every reason to assume that it would have been considered a form of speech had it ever been tested in the courts before *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976. Commercial speech, on the other hand, was never considered fair game for First Amendment protection by the first great generation of absolutists, nor by their most principled academic heirs today. When the Supreme Court considered whether advertising should be protected by the First Amendment from government regulation—in 1942—the Supreme Court, including absolutist Black, voted 9-0 against that proposition.

The Opening to a Corporate, Commercial First Amendment

The extension of the First Amendment to cover corporate and commercial activity is a recent phenomenon, taking place over the past twenty-five or thirty years. This was not due

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to any profound philosophical debates or discussions over the meaning of freedom and democracy. To the contrary, this "extension" of the First Amendment was basically a conservative response by the court system to the sheer commercialization of the culture and the corporate domination of society, as the market began to spread into every nook and cranny of social life. When commercialism penetrates everything, and when noncommercial public life diminishes or merges with commercialism, the capacity to distinguish between the two is compromised. This position was fueled to some extent by aggressive media,advertising, and corporate lobbies ever eager to eliminate government regulation of their activities, and always quick to invoke high-minded principle to justify their self-interest. If not on the law faculties, then at least in the popular mind these corporate interests and their think-tank ideologues have been among the leading definers of this newfangled "absolutism." And, regrettably, the ACLU has increasingly accepted this Philip Morris interpretation of the First Amendment.

But this, alone, only begins to explain this striking shift in interpretation of the First Amendment. The critical factor that accentuated the problem with maintaining a strict line between political and commercial speech was the commercialization of the press. The commercialization and corporate ownership of media have also been the primary reasons for the explosion of political campaign costs that underlies the concerns about unregulated political spending. In this way the issue of whether campaign contributors are protected from government regulation by the First Amendment is indelibly linked to the commercialization of the culture and of the First Amendment.

Although discussions of the First Amendment protection of a "free press" often simply take discussions of individual speech and apply them to the press without qualification, there are important differences. It is one thing to assure individuals the right to say whatever they please without fear of government regulation or worse. This is a right that can be enjoyed by everyone on a relatively equal basis. Anyone can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find a street corner to stand on to pontificate. It is another thing to say any individual has the right to establish a free press to disseminate free speech industrially to a broader audience than could be reached by the spoken word. Here, to the extent that the effective capacity to engage in free press is quite low for a significant portion of the population, the free speech analogy weakens. Moreover, those with the capacity to engage in free press are in a position to determine who can speak to the great mass of citizens and who can not. This accords special privileges to some citizens who can then dominate public debate.

The core issue for First Amendment theorists, then, is whether the First Amendment protects the rights of press owners absolutely, regardless of the implications for democracy, much as it protects individual speech regardless of the content of that speech. The alternative is to view the First Amendment protection of a free press as a social right to a diverse and uncensored press. In this view the right to a free press is a right enjoyed by all citizens equally, not just by press owners. Here the explanation for constitutional protection is implicitly linked to the need for a free press in order to have a functioning democracy. Otherwise there is no more need of its inclusion in the First Amendment than there would be for a guarantee of the right to establish a bread baking business or a shoe repair service. As Meiklejohn points out, those commercial rights are explicitly covered in the constitution by the Fifth Amendment.

Indeed, there is little dissent to the argument that the free press clause was inserted in the First Amendment to protect democracy. As the press system of that era was explicitly connected to political parties and factions, such protection was necessary to protect minority political opinion from direct harassment by the dominant political party that controlled Congress and the government. Was this a legitimate concern? Absolutely. Only a few years after the adoption of the First Amendment, the crisis surrounding the Alien and Sedition Acts emerged, in which the dominant Federalist Party attempted to use the law to muzzle the voices of Republican newspaper editors.[5]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The conflict between the anti-democratic potential of a private press system and the needs of democracy was not an important debate for much of U.S. history. During the republic's early days, the press system was highly partisan, often subsidized by government printing contracts or partisan contributions, politically motivated, and relatively noncommercial. In this period even small political factions found it relatively easy to publish and support all shades of political organs. One need only consider the broad array of abolitionist and feminist newspapers in the first half of the nineteenth century to appreciate the capacity of the press system to accommodate a wide range of political opinion. Later, during much of the nineteenth century, the partisan press system was replaced by a highly competitive, yet still fairly political, commercial press system. In this system there was still relative ease of entry to the market, and a cursory glance at any city of moderate size would tend to find a diverse press representing nearly every segment of the population. The press systems of the republic's first century were far from perfect, but they were also not by any means a primary barrier to political democracy.

All this began to change toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the press (and, later, media) became an important capitalist industry, following the explicit logic of the commercial marketplace. Over time the media system became vastly less competitive in the economic sense. Not only were most media industries concentrated in the hands of a small number of large firms; barriers to entry made new competitive challenges almost impossible. Hence the "ease of entry," which made the free press protection in the First Amendment a near universal right for citizens was effectively eliminated. Along these lines, virtually no new daily newspapers have been successfully launched in existing markets in the United States since the First World War, despite their immense profitability and growth. And likewise, no new major Hollywood film studios have been established in sixty years. Moreover, the logic of the marketplace has led to the conglomeration of media giants so that the largest firms, like Time Warner and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Disney, have dominant holdings across nearly every major media sector.

And that's not all. The media have become increasingly dependent upon advertising revenue for support, which has distinct implications for the nature of media content. Modern advertising only emerged with the arrival of corporate capitalism in the past century, and is conducted disproportionately by the very largest corporations. In the business press, the media are often referred to in exactly the way they present themselves in their candid moments: as a branch of the advertising industry. This corporate media system has none of the intrinsic interest in politics or journalism that existed in the press of earlier times. Its commercialized news fare, if anything, tends to promote depoliticization, and all evidence suggests that its fundamental political positions, such as they are, are closely linked to political and business elites. In view of ownership and subsidy, anything else would be astonishing. To be fair, the formal right to establish free press is exercised by dissidents on the margins, but the commercial system is such that these voices have no hope to expand beyond their metaphorical house arrest.

The rise of this corporate media system augurs a moment of truth for the First Amendment and its protection of a free press. Are corporations the same as people? Do shareholders and executives at corporations—clearly driven by law and the market to maximize profit regardless of the social implications—have the unconditional right to censor media content? Should investors be granted the First Amendment right to select and censor journalists when they have no more concern for the press than they have for any other potentially profitable investment? Is it right that this capacity to censor be restricted to the very wealthiest Americans, or those they hire to explicitly represent their interests? How does one distinguish what speech is necessary for politics—and thereby absolutely protected by the First Amendment—when it seems that all speech is increasingly concerned only with commercial gain, and political democracy is not even a prerequisite for its existence? Being an absolutist for a commercial media system

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then appears to have precious little to do with democracy and a great deal to do with protecting a powerful industry (and the class that owns it) from the same legal potential for public accountability that other similar industries face. And if the First Amendment covers corporate media, by what logic should it not cover corporate advertisers, or food manufacturers, or commerce in general?

This conflict first emerged in the Progressive Era, when chain newspaper ownership, one-newspaper towns and advertising had converted much of the U.S. press into blatant advocates for the status quo, while the formal right to launch newspapers meant little to dissidents who could not survive commercially in a semi-monopolistic market.[6] The material response to this crisis was the introduction of "professional" and "objective" journalism, and formal university-level schools of journalism, usually at the urging of the largest newspaper publishers. By the logic of professionalism, the journalists would produce a neutral product that did not reflect the biases of the owners, the advertisers, or themselves. Hence, while the owners maintained control of the industry and First Amendment protection, they would informally recognize the need for autonomous journalism with integrity that the public could trust. How successful or viable professionalism has been as a counterbalance to corporate commercial media control has been the subject of considerable debate over the years.[7] In recent years, however, many observers concede that journalistic autonomy has been shrunk or eliminated under commercial pressures from corporate owners.

Some Meiklejohnians—most notably Jerome Barron—would eventually argue that a commitment to the spirit of the First Amendment required the government to intervene to assure that semi-monopolistic newspapers provide a diverse range of views.[8] But for the most part those in the Meiklejohnian tradition have shied away from this response to the anti-democratic implications of the corporate media market: the prospect of government intervention in the press is *by definition* censorship and is therefore not acceptable under any circumstances. The experience with fascist and authori-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tarian media systems justifiably gave everyone trepidation about government-regulated media. And when the Supreme Court heard Barron's argument in *Miami Herald v. Tornillo* in 1974, it voted 9-0 against his position. Justice William O. Douglas displayed his utter contempt for Barron's position by reading a newspaper during his argument. It is worth noting, however, that the Supreme Court did not directly state that the right of the First Amendment belonged to the owners. The government cannot regulate "the exercise of editorial control and judgement," Chief Justice Warren Burger's opinion stated. Justice Byron White's concurring opinion noted that the government cannot "insinuate itself into the editorial rooms of this nation's press."[9] Clearly, the Court accepted the traditional presupposition that there is no important distinction between owners and editors, and its concern was to protect editors, not investors. In fact, editors and journalists have no First Amendment protection unless ceded by the owners. Wallowing in the nineteenth century mythology preferred by the corporate media lawyers and ideologues, the Supreme Court has never directly addressed what the First Amendment means for a free press in the modern corporate commercial system.

There are two other "Meiklejohnian" solutions to the crisis of democracy generated by a corporate-dominated, commercially marinated media system. The most radical is to eliminate commercial media for the most part and create a large, nonprofit, noncommercial media system accountable to the public. In the Progressive era, for example, John Dewey and others proposed that newspapers be established as nonprofit and noncommercial enterprises, supported by endowments like universities, and managed through direct public election (or election by the workers) of their officers. Even press magnate Joseph Pulitzer broached the idea of converting his newspapers into nonprofit trusts to be run like universities, but he backed down, one suspects, when his heirs got wind of the idea.

The less radical solution is to accept the existence of the corporate media giants, seek to regulate at least the broadcast-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers, and then tax the media giants or use public monies to establish a viable nonprofit and noncommercial media system that can service the needs of those citizens unable to own media corporations. But proposals like these have met with significant corporate opposition and concerns that they would let the government control media to an unacceptable extent, no matter how the nonprofit media system might be structured. From the Progressive era to the present day, the corporate media giants have fanned this flame, using their immense resources to popularize the notion that a gulag-style, darkness-at-noon media system is the only possible alternative to the corporate, commercial status quo. Hence any challenge to their power was a challenge to democracy. It may well be that the various commercial media industries—from newspaper publishers to broadcasters to film studios to advertisers—have been the foremost practitioners of public relations in this century. Anything more than marginal structural media reform, it is clear, cannot be successfully implemented unless it is part of a broader political challenge to the business domination of U.S. society.

Broadcasting, on balance, offered the most hope for those who wished to see a First Amendment committed to democratic media, as the limited number of possible channels meant that there was no escaping that the government would determine who would broadcast and who would not, and the terms under which they would broadcast. All Supreme Court decisions have affirmed the right of the government to regulate broadcasting in a manner that would be unconstitutional with the print media. In broadcasting, at least, the First Amendment has formally been acknowledged to be the property of viewers and listeners as much as licensed broadcasters.

Broadcasting provided the Waterloo as such for Meiklejohnian absolutism. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the government in effect turned over the very best slots to a handful of private commercial operations including NBC and CBS, with virtually no public or congressional debate on the matter. Sections of the U.S. population were appalled by this giveaway and the resulting commercial carpet bombing of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

publicly owned airwaves. In the 1930s the ACLU, inspired by its mentor Meiklejohn and with the active encouragement of Dewey, was so alarmed by the explicit and implicit censorship in corporate and advertiser control of radio—especially against labor and the left—that it argued that the very system of commercial broadcasting was a violation of the First Amendment. For most of the 1930s the ACLU worked to have the government establish a nonprofit and noncommercial radio system that would foster more coverage of social issues and public affairs, greater exchange of ideas, and diversity of opinion. The ACLU only backed off from this position when it became clear that corporate power was entrenched and unchallengeable. After abandoning its commitment to structural reform, the ACLU went from being proponents of an aggressive regulation of commercial broadcasters in the public interest to being ambiguous defenders of the commercial broadcasters ability to do whatever they pleased to maximize profits without government interference.[10] Eventually many liberals connected to the ACLU and elsewhere began to concentrate on defending the First Amendment rights of commercial broadcasters to censor material as they saw fit.

Since then the ACLU and the liberal community in general have shown increased willingness to include commercial activities under the rubric of the First Amendment, even if their relationship to political democracy is weak or nonexistent. When the line between what is commercial and what is political is muddled, as it has become over the course of the twentieth century, absolutists and civil libertarians have two options. One is to extend the First Amendment to include more commercial fare, and the other is to narrow the First Amendment down so that it only covers noncommercial and even nonprofit speech. The former course offends no one in power and comports to the existing social structure, hence requiring no social change. The latter course goes directly counter to the trajectory of the political economy, hence demanding an explicit commitment to sweeping institutional change in the media industries, and placing one in direct conflict with dominant media and corporate power. The latter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

course regards the First Amendment as a fundamentally radical statement, not a fundamentally conservative one. This is the logical trajectory of Meiklejohnian absolutism, and its decline mirrors the general decline of the democratic left in the United States.

Conclusion

As impractical as Meiklejohnian absolutism seems today, its analysis hit the bullseye. As Meiklejohn feared, we are losing our capacity to distinguish public life from the commercial realm, with public life suffering as a consequence. It is a primary factor in the raging depoliticization and atomization of social life. Indeed, this is a theme that resounds in some of the most penetrating social criticism, ranging from C. Wright Mills and Jurgen Habermas to Noam Chomsky and Robert Putnam. It is a crisis that the proponents of extending the First Amendment to all campaign contributions and commercial speech are incapable of addressing, so it is one they dismiss as irrelevant. As one legal scholar has noted, in the nineteenth century the image of the market was used to expand the boundaries of free speech, whereas in the 20th century the image of free speech has been used to expand the power and terrain of the market.[11]

In the hands of the wealthy, the advertisers and the corporate media, the new-fangled First Amendment takes on an almost Orwellian caste. It defends the right of the wealthy few to effectively control our electoral system, thereby taking the risk out of democracy for the rich, and making a farce of it for most everyone else. These semi-monopolistic corporations that brandish the constitution as their personal property eschew any public service obligations, and claim that public efforts to demand them violate their First Amendment rights which in their view, means their unimpeded ability to maximize profit regardless of the social consequences. Indeed, the media giants use their First Amendment protection not to battle for open information, but to battle to protect their corporate privileges and subsidies.[12]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This points to the extraordinarily unprincipled nature of the ACLU's present position on the First Amendment. The tragedy of this interpretation is not that it regards government as the sole enemy of democracy. It is that it spends all its time jousting with government when regulation might possibly challenge the prerogatives of the wealthy, but steadfastly ignores the widespread activities of the government to shape the marketplace of ideas on behalf of corporate and commercial interests. Hence the fact that the federal government has turned over valuable radio and television channels to a small number of commercial firms at no charge and with virtually no public debate is not considered a violation of the First Amendment, or a matter of concern to civil libertarians. Yet this activity has put distinct limits on the range of ideas that could emanate from the resulting broadcasting system.

And the fact that the U.S. government subsidizes a top-secret national security apparatus to the tune of at least $30 billion per year—with a significant amount of its work going to the dissemination of propaganda and the harassment of political dissidents—is also not apparently a First Amendment concern. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that the ACLU's Washington office effectively cooperated with the CIA's efforts to censor the writings of its former employees in the 1980s.[13] In Meiklejohn's perspective, the very existence of the CIA signified that this was not a democratic society, because the rulers had a weapon of immense power unaccountable to the citizenry. The modern day corporate-friendly absolutists, on the other hand, prefer to evoke a self-righteous posture celebrating their courageous stance on behalf of freedom, all the while never saying anything that would anger anyone in power. And nowhere is that more apparent than in the case of extending First Amendment protection to all forms of political contributions.

It would be comforting to think that we could depend on the Supreme Court to do the right thing and reverse *Buckley v. Valeo* and reclaim the First Amendment for democracy, but we cannot. This court was appointed by politicians who benefit from the status quo, and it has already shown a lack of backbone on related issues. And the courts tend to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conservative institutions, generally reversing earlier decisions only when they see significant changes in social attitudes on an issue. The job for progressives and activists, then, is to raise holy hell about our corrupt electoral system and our bogus corporate media system, and make it a key target of a social movement that takes direct aim at social inequality and class privilege. We need to link up electoral reform with media reform as well, so that we can create the type of accountable nonprofit and noncommercial media sector that can actually stimulate public participation. And in the process of doing so we need to pressure the ACLU to return to its roots as a force for justice and democracy, or expose it as a liberal fig leaf for plutocracy.[14] As the old saw goes, if we create pressure in the streets, we might get some results in the suites.

NOTES

1. See C. Edwin Baker, "Giving the Audience What It Wants," *The Ohio State Law Journal*, vol. 58, no. 2 (1997); pp. 311-417.
2. For an elaboration of the ACLU position, see Laura W. Murphy, "We Refuse to Sacrifice the First Amendment in a Desperate Attempt to Adopt Reform Legislation," *The Progressive*, vol. 61, no. 12 (December, 1997), pp. 20-22.
3. Alexander Meiklejohn, *Political Freedom: The Constitutional Powers of the People* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960).
4. See Thomas I. Emerson, *Toward a General Theory of the First Amendment* (New York: Random House, 1963).
5. See Richard N. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Stanley E. Flink, *Sentinel Under Siege* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).
6. See Dan Schiller, *Theorizing Communication: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
7. See Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News* (New York: Pantheon, 1979).
8. See Jerome A. Barron, "Access to the Press—A New First Amendment Right," *Harvard Law Review* 80 (1967), pp. 1641-1678.
9. *Miami Herald Publishing Company v. Tornillo*, 94 S. Ct. 2831 (1974), pp. 2840, 2841.
10. I cover this entire episode and the ACLU's transformation in Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
11. See David Kairys, "Freedom of Speech," *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*, ed. David Kairys (New York: Pantheon, 1982), pp. 140-171.
12. See Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 5th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
13. Angus Mackenzie, *Secrets: The CIA's War at Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
14. A strong vocal opposition to the ACLU position has now emerged within the ACLU itself; today this is the most divisive question in the organization, a healthy development.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEING WHITE IN BLACK/WHITE RELATIONS: A PROFESSOR'S SINGULAR LIFE JOURNEY

by EDWIN D. HOFFMAN

How many seasons of observation, how many episodes of interaction, how many pauses for reflection must it take for the white man to discern what it is truly like to be black in America and to comprehend the nature of personal black/white relations? Over a life span what opportunities present themselves and what efforts must be made to understand the African-American experience and to liberate oneself from the elements of racism that still are so invasive in white lives? Can any white ever come close enough to the mass of black people to feel confident in his understanding and his effectiveness?

It was the 1920s. Lynchings were still commonplace. Discrimination and segregation, while most extreme in the South, were nationwide. Black voices of protest and pride now flowered in a "Harlem Renaissance." I was a boy living in a white cocoon, totally unaware of the millions of blacks in my country, let alone what they were experiencing. In my Long Island town all of my friends were white, as were my schoolmates, my teachers, the policeman, and the Good Humor

Edwin D. Hoffman is Professor Emeritus and former Dean of Instruction at West Virginia State College. He now teaches African-American History at California State University, Hayward, California. An earlier edition of this article was first printed in *The Journal of Intergroup Relations* (vol. XXIV, no. 2, Summer 1997).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man. The only non-white I had ever spoken to was Hattie, the live-in maid of my aunt and uncle. She was "colored."

When the Great Depression bankrupted my father, my family moved to the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City, to live in an ethnic salad bowl of white neighbors. Once again, the friends that I made were white. If I had any black schoolmates in high school they went unnoticed. While still new to the city, I became aware that black people were crowded into a neighborhood called Harlem, and that they could be seen in the rest of Manhattan working at only the most menial jobs. I never saw them as salespersons in Macy's, as fast food servers at Nedicks or White Tower, or as bus drivers or cabbies. On a trolley ride into the Bronx one morning, I noticed a large cluster of African-American women on a Jerome Avenue corner, but it was to be years later that I learned I had seen a virtual slave market of women, desperate for work at any wages, whom white women came to hire as domestic day workers for pennies an hour.

I could not help but notice that whites cheered on Jesse Owens and Joe Louis and swung to the music of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, yet black ballplayers were never to be found at Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, or Ebbetts Field. However, I have memory's of my father taking me as a youngster to see the baseball games of the town's semi-pro team, with the visiting team occasionally being Negro. I was a constant movie-goer, but found African-American actors almost as rare as hens' teeth. Stepin Fetchit was there depicting blacks as stupid and shuffling, and the most prominent black/white relationship that I remember seeing on the silver screen was little Shirley Temple tap-dancing with the very adult Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

With millions of Americans still impoverished by the depression, with my father only able to find work as a rent collector in a housing project (where he said trying to collect rent money was like trying to get blood out of a turnip), and with my mother having to sew lace collars at home to put more bread on the family table, I became a radical youth while still

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in high school. I came to regard America's economic system as unjustly favoring the rich over the common people.

I was able to qualify for admission to the College of the City of New York, then fully free. If you were a radical at C.C.N.Y., you quickly developed a growing awareness that blacks in America were especially maltreated. I readily took part in a sit-down in front of the college president's office, initiated by the black students' Frederick Douglass Society, where we demanded and won the first C.C.N.Y. course in "Negro History and Culture" and the appointment of the college's first black instructor, Dr. Max Yergan. I took that course, and came to realize that all of the text books and teachers that I had from grade school to college had slighted or ignored both the accomplishments and the oppression of the African-American people. I came to admire the innumerable acts of black resistance to slavery and Jim Crow, and the creativity and dedication of blacks like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Paul Robeson. I was fortunate. Opportunities were rare in the 1930s to learn and be inspired by such accomplishments and talents. It would not be until the Civil Rights Era that black student militancy would win Black Studies and Ethnic Studies programs on hundreds of campuses, and the thousands who enrolled in these courses would enrich their lives by the study of African-American history and culture.

My neighborhood friends, the buddies I had at all-male City College and the girls I dated, were all white. I recall bringing home for dinner a black student who was a fellow activist, the first African American ever to eat at my family's table. My parents, as I expected, received him warmly. They were not among the Jews who referred to African Americans as "schwartzers," literally blacks in Yiddish but used pejoratively like the term "nigger." Even as a leader of the left-wing American Student Union with its hundreds of members at C.C.N.Y., I had only occasional contact with my black fellow students, and the photograph of the Student Council in my yearbook showed me in a group of nineteen white campus leaders.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For part of my college years my family's narrowed income required that I work and attend evening classes. I became a "runner" on Wall Street, carrying securities for a brokerage firm. I never saw an African American working in the financial district. I remember the want ads in the New York newspapers calling for WASP applicants only. Getting work on Wall Street when one was white but not a Protestant was a rare happening. It gave me an understanding of how Anti-Semitism was comparable to white racism, albeit a pale semblance in America of the intolerance faced by blacks.

Upon graduation I worked once more on Wall Street, now as a billing clerk, and began graduate studies at Columbia University's Teachers College. Again, a school on Harlem's edge, where everyone of my professors were white, my classmates were white, and my history textbooks were still all whitewashed. Even an esteemed scholar like Professor Henry Steele Commager, from whom I learned constitutional history, showed insensitivity to the African-American experience when he co-authored a popular college textbook which pinned on the enslaved blacks the derogatory name, "Sambo." Happily, Professor Erling Hunt, my doctoral advisor, encouraged my research on some early freedom struggles of African Americans.

Then it was the Second World War and the army. Four years, first as an enlisted man and then as an officer, in camps in the South and then in combat and in occupation in Europe. I never soldiered with blacks, never came in contact with one, since America's armed forces were so tightly segregated. I did see all of the evidence of Jim Crow in the Southern towns near the army posts. Their flagrant Dixie bigotry seemed hardly different from the evidences of Nazism which I came to see in German towns.

After the war, my interaction with blacks was modest. Both in graduate school and while teaching history at Brooklyn's Long Island University. I was still in an essentially white setting. However, when I ran in my neighborhood for the New York State Assembly on the American Labor Party ticket, I jointly campaigned with its black candidate for the State

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Senate. Right after the white hate mob attacked the crowd at Paul Robeson's Peekskill concert, I arranged for him to make his next public appearance in my neighborhood at the Audubon Ballroom (the very same hall where years later Malcolm X was assassinated).

In 1954 along came the famous Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which promised the desegregation of the South's public schools. I became enthused enough about the prospect of a better day for African Americans to want to be a helpmate in the forthcoming change. I asked Columbia University to assist me in securing a teaching position at a Southern black college. Weeks later I was in Harlem's Teresa Hotel being interviewed by the president and the chairman of the Board of Trustees of Allen University, an African Methodist Episcopal college in Columbia, South Carolina. I learned from president Samuel Higgins that Allen had a long prized history of teaching its students with an all-black faculty. New, expecting that its graduates would soon be teaching with whites at integrated public schools, Allen had decided to employ two white professors who could help accustom its students to relate confidently with whites. Bishop Frank Madison Reid, the board chairman, was most concerned that the new white professors would not give "any aid or comfort to the Dixiecrats" (as the extreme segregationists were then called). Assuring him that I stood for full equality, I was welcomed.

A whole new life opened for me. Every student of mine was now black, as were Allen's administrators, staff, and every faculty member except the newly added Rhodes Scholar John Rideout and me. Despite South Carolina's deliberately meager funding for the education of its black citizens, the African-American public school teachers had prepared Allen's students for college-level studies. I was able to teach American and world history much as I had done in New York. My students were exhilarated by their opportunity to learn how courageously and insistently their forebears had struggled for justice and liberation. I focused on that reason for black pride when I gave my first chapel hour speech to the student body

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and faculty, saying that "Negro history is a weapon—cherish it and use it as you continue that fight for freedom and equality so ably started by the Frederick Douglasses and the Harriet Tubmans and their white allies, the William Lloyd Garrisons and the John Browns."

I would soon notice that few of my African-American colleagues expressed in my hearing the disdain for Jim Crow that Bishop Reid asserted, and that a Booker T. Washington traditionalism was deeply rooted at Allen. Also evident was the insidious impingement of white values, which I knew from my readings was a consequence of white domination since the first day of slavery. There was the male preference for lighter-skinned African-American women, with the black men who enjoyed the more prestigious positions invariably wedded to spouses decidedly fairer than themselves. Most black women showed a similar admiration for white concepts of beauty, echoing *Ebony* magazine in its 1950s selection of white-featured African-American models. I recall a frustrated biology professor telling me of her failure to get a friend admitted to a black women's bridge circle because the friend was deemed too dark. Ironically, the fairest African American whom I ever saw on Allen's campus was the eminent W.E.B. Du Bois, invited by me to speak at a Chapel Hour. He, better than many other scholar, could tell how blacks were able to survive by creating and preserving much of their own culture despite the centuries of white oppression.

There was also, I quickly learned, a tradition of social formality and propriety at Allen that contrasted sharply with the New York ways that I knew. At the first informal backyard gathering to which my wife and I were invited she and I were the only ones who dressed casually. On campus one was greeted not by a "Hello" or "Good Morning," but by having one's title and name called—"Miss Cumbo." or "Doctor Wiggins." The latter was a Northern black, ousted from the University of Minnesota for his Progressive Party politics, who became my first really close African-American friend.

While John Rideout and I were appreciated for the quality of our teaching, for the doctorates we brought that met

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Allen's accreditation needs, and for our concern for the well-being of the college, we were always outsiders. Having experienced lifetimes of white duplicity and chauvinism, blacks had good reason to be suspicious of our motives. As the professor who was Bishop Reid's niece put it to me, "You're here to write about us, aren't you?" No one on campus related to me as straightforwardly as did Modjeska Simkins, the state's most militant and courageous N.A.A.C.P. leader. She converted her bedroom into a hornet's nest of stings for the racists, with a much-used mimeograph machine and with half of her double bed piled high with pamphlets and papers. Her telephone was always available for use by her phoneless, poor white neighbors. They could well have been among the majority of South Carolina whites whom I would hear refer to blacks as "the coloreds." Once, while driving through the countryside with Mrs. Simkins, we came upon a roadside sign pointing to "COLORED LAKE." She chuckled at this example of white Southern ways and said, "Let's go see what color that lake is."

To my surprise, I would hear blacks speak of "Negroes, whites, and Jews." I was aware that Harlemites felt exploited by their Jewish landlords and storekeepers, but the differentiation made by Southern blacks between Jews and other whites seemed almost racial. I would wonder whether those at Allen who were cognizant of my ethnicity regarded me as part of a people who also endured discrimination, and therefore were somewhat more empathetic to black strivings for justice, or regarded every Jew as an inconsequential variation of the dominating white. It seemed likely that my being a white Northerner was deemed more significant than my being Jewish, for Rideout, very much the WASP, and I were most often seen as one by our colleagues and students.

In the hope that my family might serve as a bridge to the white community, President Higgins had encouraged me to move into a white neighborhood. Because I taught at Allen, most neighbors gave a cold shoulder to my wife, my son, and me, almost as if we were blacks who had come to live in their midst. Whenever Forrest Wiggins and a black ophthalmolo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gist friend came to our home for an evening game of bridge, they both made a point of pulling down the window shades saying only half in jest "So we'll not be shot in the back."

That two Northern whites and a Northern black were never securely positioned in the Southern, African-American environment of Allen University was made evident by our third year there, when South Carolina's Dixiecrat Governor Timmerman, having a new A.M.E. bishop and a new college president to do his bidding, demanded our ouster as dangerous "reds." Since our only manifest subversiveness was opposition to every form of discrimination and bigotry, Allen's Board of Trustees refused to go along with the wishes of governor, bishop and president. The governor then deployed a powerful weapon, his decree that no graduate of Allen could be certified to teach in South Carolina's still segregated public schools until we were dismissed. The African-American press across the South reported prominently and frequently on our refusal and that of Allen's trustees to bow to the ultra-segregationist governor. The local black clergy denounced him and hundreds of students demonstrated for our retention. The trustees held out for two years then told us goodbye. At the 1958 Commencement, our supporters handed out a leaflet saying that, by having driven away "its three finest teachers," Allen had disgraced itself by crawling backward "while Montgomery, Little Rock, Tallahassee, and other places march forward in the fight for full freedom."

I think that I would have stayed at that church-related black college for the remainder of my academic life, despite its very low salaries and the drawbacks of working with men and women who by law and custom were forbidden to sit beside my wife and me at a movie theater or dine with us in a white restaurant. It had been so satisfying to teach at this African-American college where I was able to share my knowledge and concerns with hundreds of students whose coming to Allen was so often made possible by the collection plates passed in South Carolina black churches. I had come to know and appreciate black life far better than ever before and could expect to grow each year in understanding. I had been able

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to do research that would get published in *The Journal of Negro History* on the Sea Islands freedmen in Reconstruction years and on the early history of the South Carolina N.A.A.C.P. I would have found it especially rewarding to have been at Allen in the 1960s when the civil rights movement shattered South Carolina's Jim Crow.

For the next two years I taught at North Carolina's Pembroke State College while Rideout and Wiggins were able to move to black colleges in Texas. Pembroke State, not yet allowed to enroll African Americans, was half-white, half Lumbee Indian.

Then, one spring day in 1960, upon reading the article "Reverse Integration" in the *New York Times*, I learned about West Virginia State College, virtually all black until *Brown* and since then welcoming many hundreds of white students to its midst. With memories of how much I had valued my four years at Allen, I wrote to West Virginia State asking whether I might be considered for a professorship in history. Dr. William Wallace, its president, replied that the college had no opening in my discipline, and asked if I would like to be a candidate for its new position of Assistant Dean of Instruction. I happily said yes, interviewed, and was employed—to become the college's first white administrator, teamed with a caring, conservative African-American Dean of Instruction. My family would be the first white residents of campus housing.

West Virginia State College, situated in the black village of Institute, became the locus of my academic life for twenty-eight years, six as assistant dean, nine as its chief academic officer, and a final thirteen solely as a professor of history. It was a long immersion into a far different academic setting, one that made Allen University seem ever so parochial by comparison. West Virginia State had earned a reputation as an outstanding negro college, attracting black students from most parts of the United States, many of whom were children of its alumni. The black majority of its faculty and administration, denied the opportunity to teach at America's white colleges and universities prior to *Brown*, was a most impressive assemblage—having an excellent command of their disci-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plines, being confident of their abilities, and displaying dynamic personalities in the classroom and other aspects of college life.

I formed indelible, positive impressions of my new colleagues, for almost every one of them had created a persona that had to be noticed. Surely there had been no one at Allen like the erudite psychology professor who enjoyed buying the occasional cigarettes from me (paying two cents apiece) and who would go down on his knees as his well-taught students began their final exams, jocularly praying, "Help them, Oh Lord, for they know not what they do." Nor had I known previously anyone like the English professor, invariably a latecomer to committee meetings, who while still well down the hallway, would overhear the discussion and proclaim her cogent views even before entering the room—and then was liable to drop by my home late in the evening for further commenting.

Most impressive was the egalitarian nature of State's administrators and professors. They genially shared common social lives with the staff—be they clerks, custodians, or craftsmen—thus strengthening the sense of unity that blacks have had to have in white America. This custom was no barrier to cordial relations with those who were white, and good numbers of us were invited to the formal dances of the graduate chapters of the black sororities and fraternities and to the social gatherings at black homes.

When the African-American author, John Killens, came to West Virginia State College to write about its "integration in reverse" for Holiday magazine, he remarked to me that for black people there was Up South and Down South, that in all of America his people were ill-treated, but in the North, white behavior was less predictable. West Virginia, I had come to learn, was not the South but was tinged with Southern ways. Some of the white students who came to the college in great numbers seemed to shed a few layers of prejudice in the lively and rigorous classes of their black professors. However, other layers remained unshed. A number of white students took their senior year at the nearby private white college to avoid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

appearing to be graduates of a school still perceived to be black. Only a handful of whites would live in State's dormitories. Most white students and alumni were more likely to be at the football games of their former, predominantly white high schools than at the college games. By the late 1960s, with Dr. King and Malcolm X now both martyred, most blacks at State also shied from integration, clustering in classrooms instead of interspersing with the white students, voting as a bloc in school elections, demonstrating to have a new dormitory named for Malcolm X, and only rarely including the white majority in their social life. Many must have sensed the extent of white student reluctance to truly integrate. Some must have concurred with James Baldwin who saw America so troubled that he asked who would want to be integrated into a burning house.

President Wallace saw West Virginia State, it should be noted, as a "living laboratory of human relations," a grand opportunity for blacks and whites to grow in mutual respect. How many of the black faculty shared his optimism is uncertain. I had a growing concern that State was desegregating but hardly integrating its student body, and that its notable black character was being consumed by the rapid white influx of faculty and students.

With the diversity that characterized West Virginia State and the stimulation that came with the 1960s, I was far more able then I had been at Allen to impact positively on the college community. However, there were many moments when I was well reminded that I perceive with a white mind, and that blacks on campus might see things differently. I would praise Martin Luther King and Muhammed Ali for opposing the Vietnam War policies of President Johnson, only to find that many African-American colleagues supported him enthusiastically because of his responsiveness to black domestic concerns. Then there was the evening when my wife and I, strolling on campus, were saucily greeted by a trio of black dormitory students: "Good evening, Dean Hoffman. Good evening, Miss Ann"—a hardly subtle reminder that any white administrator and his spouse could be regarded as akin to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

master and mistress of a plantation. Most perturbing were my thoughts after Dr. King was assassinated. President Wallace failed to reach me to have me join him at the college union and help him calm the hundreds of black students who expected to clash that evening with the white racists from the next town. When I heard on the following morning that I had been sought, my outrage over the assassination became mixed with the realization that the understandably agitated students could hardly have been calmed by their white dean, nor would they have cared for any opinions that I might have offered.

In 1975, when I resigned as dean and returned to teaching one year after President Wallace retired, I left behind much vested authority. Some of my black colleagues continued to regard me as part of the dominant white majority in our country despite my commitment to African-American liberation. Some colleagues considered me too critical of the black presidents who followed Wallace since I deemed two of them to be grossly subservient to West Virginia's totally white political and business power structure. However, other colleagues would side with me, a reminder that the African Americans whom I knew were not of one mind, that they often divided on campus and off. Agreeing or disagreeing, African-American campus friends were never lacking, and some have remained close until this day.

My concern for West Virginia State was coupled with concern for the well-being of Institute and other nearby black neighborhoods. Right beside the college is a huge petrochemical plant—then owned by Union Carbide—and an incessant spewer of toxins. In 1984, Carbide had a catastrophic leak of Methyl Isocyanate (MIC) at its plant in Bhopal, India. On learning that a far greater volume of this deadly chemical was being produced just yards away from the college and the black homes nearby, I proposed the creation of a community movement calling for safer chemical production, and People Concerned About MIC was born, with most of its members being local African-Americans. Some months later when the Institute Carbide plant had a large injurious leak of another toxin, I persuaded its Chemicals CEO to come from corporate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

headquarters in Connecticut to hear the community's concerns. We had a magnificent meeting of hundreds, mostly African Americans, with a good dozen of them demanding safety in passionate and damning speeches. There was no moment in my twenty-eight years in West Virginia when I felt closer to the African-American people, or when many blacks felt closer to me.

It was soon time to leave. By 1988 the college, both faculty and students, had become overwhelmingly white. Almost all of the black professors whom I had esteemed in the 1960s had retired or died, and I could not expect the few concerned blacks now there to reverse the whitening. (Dr. Barbara Oden, now State's chief academic officer, was quoted recently in the student newspaper, saying that she hasn't seen much concern since I was there, and that I was "great at hiring black faculty." I would add not great enough to preserve a well-balanced faculty.) My wife and I decided to move to the San Francisco Bay Area and, on doing so, became part of a predominantly white set of progressive friends and acquaintances. My ties to blacks in California principally have been in the classroom, teaching courses in African-American history at California State University, Hayward. (When being interviewed by its departmental committee, the professors remarked how exceptional my life had been when compared to their conventional academic careers). At Hayward I have not only been able to interact once again with black students, usually a small portion of each African-American history class, but I have also been able to share the understanding that I gained during the many decades of my life with a happy mix of Caucasian, Latino, Asian, and African-American students.

I am now aware of the parameters of wholesome black/white relations. Most white liberals whom I came to know tended to be fearful of offending blacks were they to criticize strongly any of their opinions or actions. I have learned that you show respect and are most respected when you express your difference with full frankness. I have also learned that a white should not aspire to lead African

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Americans in their struggle for justice and freedom, that whenever they are in concert with whites, they must be aware of the propensity of their white allies to be patronizing and domineering. As Ossie Davis observed on the death of Malcolm X, Malcolm warned blacks not to "stand back and let the white man speak up for us, defend us, and lead us from behind the scene of our fight." Happily, there have been enough African-American friends in my life to temper any tendencies I have had to be more than a co-participant in the black struggle—and to encourage me and other concerned whites to work hand-in-hand with the blacks for our common goals.

As a white who has wanted to help end the injustice of racism, I must ask whether that understanding which I have gained—both from interaction with fellow Americans who have been black and from the studies I have undertaken—has positively affected my students. I have taught African-American history for many decades with the aim that my students, black and not black, might learn of black accomplishments and the logic for their freedom struggle. In my Allen years I accented the long history of maltreatment by the dominant whites. By the 1960s at West Virginia State, I gave added emphases to black resistance, black creativity, and the diversity of African-American voices. At California State University, Hayward some of my black students already identified with Afrocentrism, and that encouraged me to have classes compare the values of this viewpoint with the more traditional ones. I also have chosen four textbooks for the survey course in African-American history, all with black authors, so that students could both see how black scholars varied in their interpreting of their people's history so that their white professor would not be their principal authority.

Had my life been that of a steel worker, coal miner, or a nurse, perhaps the camaraderie with fellow workers who were black would have resulted in a truer interracial closeness. Had I been born a half century later, perhaps I would feel my youthful generation to be far less tainted by racism than older Americans and, therefore, better able to bridge the gap be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tween white and black. Had I been a Christian with a strong sense of brotherhood, perhaps I would be welcomed in the Amen Corner of black life. But do not such suppositions, probable or improbable, rely on the dubious assumption that the "color line" (that insightful term of Dr. DuBois) may soon be faded? The myriad of ways by which America's institutional racism despotizes and alienates must continue to remind African Americans (and all other people of color!) that it is naive to expect the chasm of racism to be bridged soon, particularly in the mean and greedy society that we have become.

It must be noticed that my essentially academic journey has been mainly among blacks within or close to the ivory tower of academe. I have been distanced most from the vast numbers of African Americans who have been enduring and resisting the intolerable oppressiveness of the inner-city. With the divide between their reality and mine being so great, what I have learned and what I have accomplished must be qualified in scope and depth. I am under no illusion that I, like almost every other white, have completely exorcised racism in mind and behavior, or that I comprehend the black experience. But, teaching as I do, studying as I do, interacting as I do, I can hope to keep progressing toward a truer understanding and an even closer bonding with my black fellow Americans.

My singular life journey from racial insularity to interacting with and reflecting upon African Americans has been a deeply satisfying one. My teaching has been enriched and my humanity has been nurtured by Max Yergan, Frank Reid, Samuel Higgins, Forrest Wiggins, Modjeska Simkins, William Wallace, Barbara Oden, and many African-American friends and colleagues not named in this essay. I believe that I have had exceptional opportunities to grow in understanding and have done so, and that I have been able to get in some good licks against the racism that has so damaged our country.

NOTE TO OUR READERS: To commemorate MR's fiftieth birthday, we are preparing a brief history of the institution. Please share your memories, files, photographs, or miscellany. Contact Christopher Phelps at the MR office or e-mail at <cphelps@igc.org>.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Horror Show, Inc.

by Doug Dowd

Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997) 262 pp., $17.95, paper.

This century has abounded in totalitarian societies, where speech and, to a large extent even thought, has been made to conform to a rigid pattern. Their social conformism has been critically dependent upon the use and clear threat of brute force, mixed with varying degrees of uncoerced assent. Although there is all too much brute force in our own and others' free societies today, it is largely confined to the poor of both the rich and the poor societies; nowadays the jackboot, though its tenure is far from endangered, is less vital.

Nowadays the main source of social control is "soft"—media-engineered submission to the ideology and politics of "the free market"—bought and paid for by today's supercorporations (among which are the media giants themselves), and "enjoyed" by the people: a striking instance of Gramsci's "consenting acceptance" of capitalist society. Totalitarian rulers never had it this good.

In all social formations there are formal and informal processes that put their stamp on "hearts and minds," from the first to the last breath of social air—at home, in school, church, and job,

Doug Dowd has been a lecturer in International Economics at Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies in Bologna, Italy for over ten years. He has received the Guggenheim and Fulbright Fellowships. He is the author of *Blues for America* (Monthly Review), and *Against the Conventional Wisdom: A Primer for Current Economic Controversies* (Westview/Harper Collins)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in sports, and in the media of the era. But in this century, and most spectacularly in its last quarter, that air has become unprecedentedly dense and overpowering, literally and figuratively, quantitatively and qualitatively.

The whys and wherefores of that feat are what this book is about. Reading it is not a pleasant experience; nor is going to the dentist with a rotten tooth—of which we now have a mouthful. The reasons for that require us to be our own dentist, exert ourselves to study out the nature and causes of the rot.

The proximate causes lie in the media; but they deal the cards for the larger system. Well before the strengths and spread of today's media, humanity was tragically beset by the crimes and misdemeanors intrinsic to a capitalist, nationalist, imperialist system and its misbegotten industrialism.[1] The system's evolution produced much that was useful; but it has also produced always accelerating processes of destruction—of peoples, cultures, nature. Now we are not beset only by tragedies; we are in sight of being undone.

Ishkabibble. Notwithstanding, capitalism—successfully euphemized as "the free market"[2]—has achieved its historic peak of approval, even as it effectively aspires to bring back its nineteenth century ferocities, with a quantum jump in their scale. All this is entirely screened out, spun off and camouflaged by the increasingly ingenious media, and capitalism's cancers sold as mere growing pains (or their victims' fault).

In this powerful and profusely documented analysis, Herman and McChesney detail the means bringing this calamity to be, the purposes and the economic and political powers guiding it, and how the United States has become and is likely to remain the chief actor in the ominous drama that begat the

> ... widespread acceptance and internalization of global corporate ideology ... [in which] it is the commercial media that play the central role.... The development of a global commercial media system that tends to regard corporate domination as natural and benevolent was and is the logical outgrowth of the "free market" communication policies that have come to dominate globally in the 1980s and 1990s.... [It] is not the result of any sort of conspiracy; for the global media TNCs it developed organically from their institutional basis and commercial imperatives.[3] (p. 37)

What consequences has this development wrought, and what lies ahead? To whose benefit, whose harm? In what ways? Putting those same questions differently, how have the global media come

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to be, what are their interacting relationships with our economy, our politics, our culture—our future? And what can be done about it all? How Herman and McChesney deal with all these—and other—questions can only be sampled here.

Note first the great concentration of power over the media held by a small group of giant companies:

> ... ten or so vertically integrated media conglomerates, most of which are based in the United States ... [along with] another thirty or forty significant supporting firms.... They compete vigorously on a non-price basis, but their competition is softened not only by common interests ..., but also by a vast array of joint ventures, strategic alliances, and cross-ownership ... [with their] financial underpinnings in advertising and its thoroughgoing commercialism.... There is little that distinguishes the content provided by any of these firms from that of the balance of the commercial media. (p.104)

The five largest of these giants are, in order, Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, and News Corporation. All the giants—most obviously Seagram, Sony, and GE—not only own various of the media, but firms in other sectors; in turn, that is part of a larger set of incestuous interests and activities with the rest of big business—among whose greatest thrills are those from the hawking of global "free markets" to their mutual benefit.

Such major economic realities cannot help but have political and cultural consequences, both at home and abroad. That plays itself out in many ways, none beneficial to more than 10 percent of the world's population—if, in the long run, even them.

The political consequences are numerous, only a few of them noted here:

> *Item.* Extending the franchise increased democratization in the United State; the escalating requirements of electoral finance ... has reversed this trend, in the process reducing the diversity of debate and political options.
>
> *Item.* The commercialization of broadcasting [radio and TV] has further weakened democracy by delocalizing (nationalizing) politics....
>
> *Item.* The cost and importance of TV has put a premium on well-produced and carefully packaged "spots" ... lasting 30 or 60 seconds ... that depend on images, formulas, and style ...; the U.S. candidate for major political office ... now plans and produces "commercials." (p. 147)

The commercialization of politics has gone beyond scandal and arrived at national disgrace; the daily news dishes up the surface sleaze; this book digs under that for answers to most of the how and why.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perhaps—I would say probably—of even greater concern are the meanings of the commercialization of culture already achieved and lying in wait for us down the road—this in a society which already a century ago suffered from too much of it. Culture as used here refers to society's ongoing standards, habits of thought and feeling, its sense of what is "natural," desirable and acceptable and, of course, its higher achievements (which, however, are secondary to present concerns.)

The media shape and are shaped by the larger culture. Relative to that of other societies, ours has always been a highly commercialized culture. But there has never been anything like the degrees of today's commercialization—of everything. It was the socioeconomic background of the past half century that made this possible—its technology, its relative affluence, its politics—but the media were required to transform possibilities into realities. And what a reality it is! Reflection upon one item alone should be sufficient to illustrate where we are—and where we are going:

> A 1996 survey of teenagers in television-owning households in forty-one nations finds that they watch on average six hours of television per day, and nowhere in the survey is the figure under five hours. (p. 41)

What those teenagers—and those younger and older—watch is decreasingly banal and increasingly provocative. Just what is provoked and in what proportions cannot be ascertained. But it is difficult to believe that an entertainment diet made up of rising amounts of fantasies, violence, prurient sex, and hyped-up sports programs—prodded by the advertising with like content that promotes and pays for them—will sustain what little social maturity remains, let alone enhance it. As has been said,

> Those who complain of the mindless violence of this age might perhaps reflect on the other forms of mindlessness offered to the people: mindless work, mindless pleasure, mindless spending.[4]

Mindlessness abounds, and spawns both individual and social heartlessness and recklessness. Or is it vice versa?

Global Media shows that entertainment and media outlays are growing faster than GDP almost everywhere; and that the content of the commercial media is increasingly occupied by those images and "ideas" that sell products and politics and persons most smoothly and effectively. At the same time, the public sphere—of the non-profit, noncommercial broadcast media such as NPR and PBS—and its non-media instruments (li-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

braries, schools, trade unions, voluntary associations) are in decline and disarrary: for the very reasons that an opposite trend is so desperately needed.

I have only touched on what this book offers, and what must be digested and acted upon. Is there no hope? Of course there is; and some of its possibilities are examined in the last chapter. Most important are the political steps required to end the contraction and foster the expansion of the public sphere. What of the hopes placed on the rapidly expanding Internet and the oncoming "digital revolution." As with almost any technological development, those in the electronics realm carry promising seeds; but they are at least as likely to strengthen the powers of the already powerful.

> ... the Internet and the digital revolution do not pose an immediate or even foreseeable threat to the market power of the media giants. In the current political climate, moreover, it is likely that the global media firms will be able to incorporate the Internet and related computer networks into their empires, while the egalitarian potential of the technology is minimized. Yet we are at the beginning of the digital era, so prediction beyond broad brushstrokes is problematic. (p. 107)

What is relevant, though not decisive in those respects is that over 90 percent of all computer sales are made to corporations; and up to now, at least—which doesn't mean for always—the Net has been something used and usable almost entirely by the already best-informed (when it is not just a part of the daily grunge). We'll see. But we'd better not *wait* to see.

It is always best not to count on this or any other particular piece of technology to accomplish a significant share of democratizing political work. It is always and only the organized energy and activities and determination of ordinary people, nourished by understanding, that makes for lasting social improvement.

We have it in us to undertake that work. And if we do not? Then, as Baran warned decades ago, the commercialized media will continue to corrupt and threaten to destroy

> ... our most precious non-material possessions: the confidence in the existence of meaningful purposes of human activity and the respect for the integrity of man.[5]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTES

1. Compare "misbegotten" with Einstein's view, as expressed in a letter to a friend in 1917: "Our entire much-praised technological progress, and civilization generally, could be compared to an axe in the hand of a pathological criminal." Old *MR*-ers will remember that its very first "Review of the Month" (May, 1949) was by Einstein, and entitled "Why Socialism?" It is still persuasive, and not only because of its concluding sentence: "I consider the foundation of this magazine to be an important public service." No *dummkopf*, he.
2. All theory by definition "abstracts" from reality; neoclassical economic theory, the rationale for free marketry, is *very* abstract. Among its highly restrictive assumptions most important for present purposes are 1) that all economic agents (consumers, workers, businesses) are *rational*—that is, calculate their actions (spending, working, producing, etc.) in terms of expected quantitative benefits and costs and *nothing* else; and, 2) that all businesses are so small as to be insignificant in the market, while the state is not (and should not be) an economic actor. As for (1), *irrationality*, that is, our passions (love and hate, fear and hope, pride and shame, etc.) are the very stuff of life (and, as well, of advertising); and our rationality? Tell it to the Marines. (2) All industrial economies are dominated by super-corporations and the superstates that are, largely, their creatures. Then how come almost all economists support free marketry? It's a puzzlement.
3. As regards "conspiracy," it is worth reminding what Paul Baran wrote of advertising in the early 1960s:

   > ... advertising campaigns succeed not if they seek to *change* people's attitudes but if they manage to find, by means of motivation research and similar procedures, a way of linking up with *existing* attitudes ...: status-seeking and snobbery; social, racial, and sexual discrimination; egotism and unrelatedness to others; envy, gluttony, avarice, and ruthlessness in the drive for self-advancement—all of these attitudes are not *generated* by advertising but are made use of and appealed to in the contents of advertising material. (Emphasis in original.)

   "Theses on Advertising," in *The Longer View: Essays Toward a Critique of Political Economy* edited and with an Introduction by John O'Neill; Preface by Paul M. Sweezy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 231. It is relevant to the focus of this review that the occasion for Baran's having written the essay was an invitation from the British Labour Party to participate in a conference on the matter. He couldn't go, but sent the essay. Can one imagine Tony Blair and New Labour having such a conference these days? Or, if they were to do so, to invite the likes of Paul Baran?
4. Jeremy Seabrook, in "An English Exile," in *GRANTA*, 56, Winter, 1996, p. 186.
5. Paul Baran, op. cit., p. 232.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

A Response to Andy Pollack's "Information Technology and Socialist Self Management"

by David Bellin and Jeremy Raw

Andy Pollack (*MR*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 1997) summarized his perspective on technology by saying that "the implementation of IT (information technology), its full use, and the purposes for which it is used, thus bring us back to the question of power, and which social groups wield it. The U.S. left has done far too little during this century to explain how the massive organizational and technical apparatus of existing society could be used in a different way."

While we are in sympathy with his first point regarding the importance of questions of power, to suggest that computers and technology simply need to be used "in a different way" is misleading. If anything, the problem with technology is not a failure to attain its "full use," but rather its *overuse* in stultifying and alienating corporate environments. Rather than dream up new tasks for existing technology, we need to set people free to re-evaluate technology from top to bottom, becoming, in the process, its masters rather than its slaves.

Pollack seems to have quite a different agenda, one which displays an alarming degree of technological determinism, and a weakness for the language of marketing brochures touting the latest developments in networking and processing power:

> Now the technical basis for the process of managing (goods and services) has taken huge leaps forward.... Computer innovations could put to rest skepticism about purely technical barriers to democratic planning.... Were

Jeremy Raw (jraw@igc.org) is a community activist and computer programmer in Durham, NC. David Bellin (dbellin@acm.org, www.cs.ncat.edu/bellin/) directs the computer science graduate program at North Carolina A&T State University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there to be a revolution in any country in the world tomorrow, the Internet would put to rest the claims about the unfeasibility of a socialist economy.... Such computers could solve any of the distributional bottlenecks said to make socialist planning impossible.... Microsoft sells an array of programs sufficient to perform most of the computing tasks that would be necessary for grassroots economic decision-making.

For our part, we do not want to reappropriate Microsoft's marketing hype, we want to dismantle it, see though it, and then combat it as we set our own working-class-oriented priorities. Pollack's article reminded us of the views once popular in the Soviet Union, which called for adopting the "best" of capitalist technology and management techniques, such as Taylorism. Worse, even though Pollack pays lip service to a broader realignment of power, suggesting that "IT" is "a tool for administering power, not a way of seizing it," he continues to be driven by a primitive view of the socialist relationship to technology, under which data entry operators rather than capitalist managers decide what to put into the computers, and socialist accounting is merely capitalist accounting with a different payee on the bottom line.

Consider this sentence, which would never pass muster on any topic other then technology: "Supercomputers long ago reached a level sufficient to run the millions of simultaneous equations that would have to be solved to plan a modern socialist economy." We might as well observe that "the productive capacity of the steel industry long ago reached a level sufficient to meet the needs of a modern socialist economy." Yet the problem is not that we need to solve so many equations. It is that we continue even to conceive of the socialist project in such terms.

Pollack's central claim is that "IT developed for internal company use could be used in a self-managed society by workers." This is about as significant as saying that the workers in a Toyota plant will be able to use the robotic paint sprayer after the revolution. Sure they can. But so what? Should we seek to take over the current means of production, or should we change them? Is it enough to get our hands on the steering wheel, or should we question the need for cars? It seems to escape Pollack's world view that we might have excellent reason not to use today's corporate information technology in a "self-managed society" (his words; we would prefer to have "workers' self-rule"). We might actually want to manage production through collective decision-making based on actual human interactions. In fact, we might even want to destroy "IT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

developed for internal company use," and replace it with other mediated forms developed through the struggle to transform the workplace itself. To claim that we will simply turn the capitalists' tools to our own benefit, with little change, is a dangerously simplistic view.

Pollack's misinterpretation of Deep Blue, the chess computer, is singularly revealing in this regard: "[T]his machine, like others of its ilk, is normally used to predict the behavior of complex systems such as weather changes, ecological shifts and other systems that are more complex than any economy." Though Deep Blue is in some ways a "massively parallel" machine, it is *not* technically a supercomputer. Furthermore, it is actually highly specialized, not only in software but at the deepest level of hardware, to the singular task of playing chess. Thus, the offhand "others of its ilk" belies the actual essence of technology under capitalism: its adaptation to precise tasks in a very narrow and specific social context. We should worry less about how to reuse such machines, and more about the significance of the social priorities they reveal—for example, building a machine to play a game better than people, or even accepting that "modeling" is the best approach to certain "complex systems" at all.

The essential problem of capitalist technology is not its unused potential as dead labor (i.e. an instrument to be set in motion by the worker), but its short-circuiting of the innovative and creative technological capacity of working people themselves. It's not who "owns" the tasks that matters, but who *defines* them in the first place. "IT," and Pollack's interpretation of it, both suffer from the same defect: projecting the future on the basis of performing most of the same tasks in the same ways. We propose instead that the socialist revolutionary process depends on the fundamental imperative to step free from the bonds of dead labor entirely: no existing technology is sacred; all technology must be fitted to people's needs rather than the other way around. A fanciful "socialist accounting" that simply repackages what technology does under capitalism provides almost no help in this task.

Given the power to define social activities in nonalienated ways, people will inevitably find a way to use the technology they need, abandon what they don't need, and invent what is missing. But to facilitate this socialist potential, we have to change the process of social reproduction from top to bottom, basing it on rationally identified needs and not on compulsion (even when that compulsion is the alienated form of our rational needs!). As always, the obstacles to such a transformation are social and not technical, regardless of the mystifying blather of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"complexity" or even the possibility that some productive tasks might make use of existing tools in the ways Pollack describes.

Information technology generally, and computer software specifically, embodies within it human thought processes, and the control and command relations that define those processes. Yet software is unique exactly in that it is "soft"—it is malleable and can be reprogrammed with greater ease than "hard" tools can be remachined. Pollack is surprisingly shallow in his vision of the re-programming, simply limiting it to new hands on old tools. In fact, such re-programming must reflect and support a comprehensive change in the social relations of production.

Most odd is Pollack's focus on brokerage houses, cybermalls, and of all people, Ross Perot! On Perot's EDS: "Imagine if these companies were taken over and turned into centers for socialist accounting." Yes, perhaps other *MR* readers can imagine the horrors which would result: a mix of computers and fascism. It is interesting that Pollack's argument hardly differs from ones made by Perot about the supposed greater efficiency of his private sector data processing operations.

Pollack's vision inspires us only to nightmares of stifling bureaucracy in a completely networked society where every personal need and transaction is pre-classified, monitored, recorded, estimated, and forecasted. "Decisions made at a national level, and registered through a socialized Big Board, could be disaggregated through the brokerage house IT apparatus." Pollack may be enthused by the millions who trade mutual funds online, but we fail to see why this is a model of socialist society. We don't want decisions made in D.C. or on some "socialist" Wall Street to be "disaggregated" into our lives, and we don't think most of the people we work with would like it either.

This resistance points squarely at Pollack's reproduction of the fundamental contradiction in most earlier attempts toward post-capitalism: rather than freeing associated individuals to create a sphere of unalienated influence throughout their participation in the social process of production, it preserves the alienation of the existing process. This alienation guarantees that the creation of needs is structurally disconnected from the means for their satisfaction, and thus institutionalizes irrationality. Overcoming alienation is the real obstacle to rationalizing socialist production, not the fact that we have too little information or processing power. To surmount this contradiction, reinterpreting our existing capitalist

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jobs in brave new socialist ways is insufficient. We must turn the whole relationship of worker to job (and to the technology which defines the job) upside down. Before anything else, this means we have to step out from behind the computer screen and get with others to relearn the practical significance of our social being.

THE LOS ANGELES
MONTHLY REVIEW DISCUSSION GROUP

ALL MEETINGS ARE THE
3RD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH
IN THE WESTSIDE PAVILION COMMUNITY ROOM B
(3RD FLOOR BEHIND THE FOOD COURT)
PICO AND OVERLAND BOULEVARDS WEST LOS ANGELES

FOR TOPICS OF FUTURE MEETINGS OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
DISCUSSION GROUP, PLEASE CALL STEVE KATZAN AT (310) 785-0703
OR SHEL POLTKIN AT (310) 390-0306

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from inside back cover)

network. This is so not only because so much of their economic performance depends on exports to the rich countries, but also because the expansion of their productive capacity is typically funded by direct investment of multinational corporations or loans from foreign banks. Payment of profits on investment and debt service has to be made in dollars, yen, marks or other strong international currencies which are obtained by a surplus of exports over imports. If the market for exports shrinks or fails to expand in line with growing capacity, the peripheral country has only one recourse after exhausting its reserve of foreign currencies. And that is to increase its foreign debt or attract more investment from abroad. If this way out works for a while, it can only lead to more trouble in the longer run, as debt service obligations and payment of profits to foreign capital keep on increasing. Debt peonage is usually the final outcome.

This pattern of excess capacity, sluggish export markets in which the nations of the region compete, growing indebtedness, and then debt peonage came rather early to the ASEAN countries because they had become favorite playgrounds for Western capital. The spurt of unusually rapid growth rates in the region opened new horizons for speculation in stock markets, real estate, and other financial outlets. Japanese, German, and U.S. banks loaded the countries up with debt at handsome interest rates. Pension funds and emerging-market mutual funds contributed to a flow of money far in excess of what could be used for long-term profitable investment in productive activities. The signs of an impending debacle were not difficult to detect, just as had happened in the period prior to the widespread debt crisis of the early 1980s and the more recent one in Mexico. Foreign reserves kept on shrinking and the deficits in balance-of-current accounts kept on growing throughout the region. But what difference did that likely future make for the financiers whose eyes were fixed on the huge profits of the present? And what difference did it make to the IMF whose statisticians reported the ominous data at the same time as the top officials were brashly trumpeting assurance that all was well? Meanwhile, the bankers of the West were confident that the IMF and their own governments would rescue them, and IMF officials reckoned that, whatever the scenario, the international financial markets of the center could be protected by shifting the costs of the rescue to the backs of the masses by enforcement of all-too-familar austerity programs.

We are pleased to anounce that *Under Attack, Fighting Back: Women and Welfare in the United States* by Mimi Abramovitz (Monthly Review Press, 1996) has been named an Outstanding Book by The Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in North America.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rethinking MARXISM

A Journal of Economics, Culture, and Society

SPECIAL OFFER 2 YEARS FOR $60.00

The aim of the journal is to stimulate interest and debate over the explanatory power and social consequences of Marxian economic and social analysis. To that end, it publishes studies that seek to discuss, elaborate, and/or extend Marxian theory. The concerns of the journal include theoretical and philosophical (methodological and epistemological) matters as well as more concrete empirical analysis – all work that leads to the further development of a distinctively Marxian discourse. Contributions are encouraged from people in many disciplines and from a wide range of perspectives. It is the editors' belief that Marxian approaches to social theory are important for developing strategies toward radical social change—in particular, for ending class exploitation and the various forms of political, cultural, and psychological oppression including oppression based on race and gender. Research that explores these and related issues from a Marxian perspective are particularly welcome.

ARTICLES OF INTEREST: Marx, Fanon, Nkrumah, and the Intersection of Socialism and Radical Feminism, *Kenneth Long* • Marxist Theory and Marxism as a Mass Ideology: The Effects of the Collapse of 'Really Existing Socialism' to West-European Marxism, *John Milios* • Throwing a Dishcloth into the Works: Troubling Theories of Domestic Labor, *Jenny Cameron* Art, Economy, and the Differentiation of Value, *Roby Rajan*

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

ISSN 0893-5696, Volume 10, 1998 (4 issues)
Individuals: $33.00; Outside U.S.: $45.00 (surface mail); $55.00 (airmail)

Special Offer to Individuals:
2 years $60.00; Outside U.S. $84.00 (surface); $104 (airmail)

Institutions: $95.00; Outside U.S.: $117.00 (airmail)
Students*: $20.00; Outside U.S.: $27.00 (surface mail); $37.00 (airmail)
*Current I.D. required.

Also available in better bookstores.

GUILFORD PUBLICATIONS, INC., Attn: Journals Dept.
72 Spring Street, New York, NY 10012
Call Toll-Free: 1-800-365-7006, 9 AM to 5 PM EST
CALL: 212-431-9800 • FAX: 212-966-6708
E-mail: staff@guilford.com
Website: http://www.guilford.com

SAMPLE COPIES AVAILABLE
samples@guilford.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Radio Free Maine

"The C-Span of the Left"

These six **Radio Free Maine** recordings have been nominated for the *1997 Harry Chapin Media Award* For outstanding coverage that positively impacts hunger, poverty and self-reliance.

✹ **Race & Racism in the 90's at Wheelock College in Boston**

Tape 1 Howard Zinn *Learning from History* / Imani Perry *The Cornerstone : Identity and Activism*

Tape 2 M. Jacqui Alexander / *Black Nation/Queer Nation? Meeting at the Crossroads: Building a Liberation Coalition for the New Millennium.*

Tape 3 Marilyn Mackel / *20th Century Slave Ships*

✹ **Conference on Faceless Justice and Human Rights in Columbia at the University of Wisconsin March 3 1997**

Tape 4 Noam Chomsky / *Population Control in the New World Order*

✹ **Radical Alternatives on the Eve of the Millennium Socialist Scholars Conference March 28-30 1997 New York City**

Tape 5 Panel 47: Greg Albo, Doug Henwood, Larry Pratt, David Abdulah, Ananya Mukerjee-Reed / *What's Wrong with Global Capitalism*

Tape 6 Panel 74: Mimi Abramovitz, Ruth Sidel, Michael Lewis, Frances Geteles / *Welfare Reform : the Road to Indentured Servitude?*

All tapes are available in audio cassette or VHS video.

Prices as follows: **Audio** $10.50 @ / 4 or more $9.50@

Postage: Canada & Mexico add $1.00 / all other countries $2.00

Video $19.00@ / 4 or more $17.50 @

Postage: Canada & Mexico add $2.00/ all other countries $3.00

For a *free* catalog send a SASE(75¢ postage) Payment (U.S. funds) must accompany order. Send check or money order payable to **Roger Leisner**

Radio Free Maine P.O.Box 2705 Augusta, Me 04338
tel/fax 207-622-6629

Look for our **Web Site**

http://www.cyborganic.com/people/stefan/RFM.html

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE 1998 SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE

A World to Win: From the Manifesto *to New Organizing for Socialist Change*

Panelists will include:

SAMIR AMIN
STANLEY ARONOWITZ
ELAINE BERNARD
LYNN CHANCER
NIRMAL CHANDRA
PEGGY CRANE
BOGDAN DENITCH
HECTOR FIGUEROA
BILL FLETCHER
JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER
STEPHEN JAY GOULD
DAVID HARVEY
DOUG HENWOOD
EDWARD HERMAN
THEA LEE
MICHAEL LÖWY
HARRY MAGDOFF
MANNING MARABLE
KIM MOODY
FRANCES FOX PIVEN
DANIEL SINGER
PAUL SWEEZY
PACO IGNACIO TAIBO
ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD

March 20, 21 & 22

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
199 CHAMBERS STREET,
NEW YORK CITY

For more information:

http://www.soc.qc.edu.ssc
socialist.conf@usa.net
212-642-2826

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from inside front cover)

capitalism." (*Business Week*, January 26, 1998) But he too was apparently thinking of financial markets, concerned with effects, not causes.

It is true, of course, that there are many weak links in the chain of international finance where an outbreak of plague can originate. But major financial crises generally have deep roots, though one would hardly think so if one listened to the glowing remarks of IMF officials, finance ministers, central bank governors, representatives of private industry, and academics at a conference in Jakarta convened in November 1996 to discuss the affairs of the member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The conclusions arrived at were summarized in an IMF release: "ASEAN's sound fundamentals bode well for sustained growth.... ASEAN's economic success remains alive and well." Less than two months after this celebration, Hambo Steel, a large Korean chaebol, went bankrupt. Thereafter, month by month, sometimes week by week, in one ASEAN country after another, omens of impending disaster showed up: service payments on foreign debt couldn't be paid, bankruptcies of industrial firms and banks spread, stock markets went berserk, currencies seemed to be in free fall.

Why the contrast between the assurance of prosperity and what happened so soon thereafter? It can reasonably be argued that unalloyed optimism was itself part of the process. The relentless drive of capital accumulation is spurred not only by competition but also by faith in the continuation of prosperity. Equally characteristic of capitalism's ways is that the underlying reality of overexpansion becomes evident in a glut of one market after another.

The much touted rapid accumulation of capital in the ASEAN nations, combined with investment in other parts of the globalized economy, ended in a vast excess of capacity in a number of key industries. Long before the celebration at the Jakarta conference, overcapacity was reflected in price declines of many of the region's important export products. According to the Financial Times (January 15, 1998):"Prices for computer memory chips, Korea's largest export, collapsed in a glutted global market. Earnings of chipmakers fell by 90 percent." Excess capacity on a world scale showed up in glutted markets for cars, petrochemicals, many electronic components, steel, and shipbuilding. The president of Ford estimated that the world car industry's production capacity is about 40 percent greater than demand.

The periodic surge of capital investment to the point where capacity far exceeds effective demand is an innate characteristic of capitalism. It is in fact at the heart of the system's recurrent economic crises and is especially threatening in a period of stagnation, such as that which began in the 1970s. The impact of glutted markets is particularly severe in countries on the periphery of the imperialist

(Continued on page 61)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

"A superbly written, excellently translated, and powerfully persuasive exposé which all students of Latin American and U.S. history must read."—CHOICE, American Library Association

Eduardo Galeano

OPEN VEINS of LATIN AMERICA

FIVE CENTURIES OF THE PILLAGE OF A CONTINENT

With a new Foreword by ISABEL ALLENDE

"A clear, passionate account of almost 500 years of Latin American history.... *Open Veins of Latin America* continues to speak to generations of people who want to understand capitalism and exploitation in Latin America, and in the rest of the world."—ELIZABETH DORE, University of Portsmouth
author of *Nicaragua: A Myth of Modernity*

"He has more first-hand knowledge of Latin America than anybody else I can think of, and uses it to tell the world of the dreams and disillusions, the hopes and the failures of its people. He is an adventurer with a talent for writing, a compassionate heart, and a soft sense of humor.... Galeano denounces exploitation with uncompromising ferocity, yet this book is almost poetic in its description of solidarity and human capacity for survival in the midst of the worst kind of despoliation."—ISABEL ALLENDE, from her new foreword to *Open Veins of Latin America*

"Well written and passionately stated, this is an intellectually honest and valuable study."—*LIBRARY JOURNAL*

$18.00 PAPER/$27.00 CLOTH/360 pp. ($3.00 P&H)

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS 1-800-670-9499

122 WEST 27th STREET · NEW YORK, NY 10001 · Tel: (212) 691-2555 · Fax: (212) 727-3676

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED